CHAPTER – III

Four phases of the Pondicherry Period

First phase (1910 – 1914)

The prominent political events that took place during these four years are a) holding of the Delhi Durbar by Emperor George V, b) the Partition of Bengal was reversed, c) capital of India was shifted from Calcutta to Delhi, d) the first all-India modern census takes place and e) World War I begins.

In 1910, The Times (Lond.) wrote `In Pondicherry, Aurobindo wore the robe of a sanyassin but continued to be an active revolutionary',

Sri Aurobindo replied, `it is untrue that I am masquerading as have masqueraded as an ascetic. I live as a simple house holder practising yoga without sanyas as I have been practising for the past six years.'
Sri Aurobindo fled the colonial police in Kolkata and reached Pondicherry via the French enclave of Chandennagore on 4 April 1910. Nine months later, on November 1910, the sedition charge against him was dismissed by Calcutta High Court.

However, the British rulers stopped him from returning to British India. The then Secretary to the Government of India Earl of Crew said, ``let him remain where it was’’.

The British in India wanted to deport him. However, both extradition and deportation were disallowed. They held him conspiring against the British empire from Pondicherry and keeping touch with Bengal revolutionaries. In fact Sri Aurobindo also admitted to keeping in touch with Bengal revolutionaries.

Later he admitted in third person ``for some years he (Sri Aurobindo) kept some private communication with revolutionary forces he had led through one or two individuals. But this also he dropped after sometime and his abstention from any kind of participation in politics became complete’’.
The British government however was not ready to accept such a position. They monitored his movements. In fact, the British were right. In the early years of his stay in Pondicherry Sri Aurobindo had been boosting the morale of the freedom fighters. By 1912, almost there were thirty-three robberies and criminal incidents of attacks on British officers by local revolutionaries took place in Calcutta 6.

Sri Aurobindo was kept informed on every incident.

But in Pondicherry, he had abandoned the idea of armed insurrection and open revolution, though he said ``the revolutionary spirit for freedom had to be maintained intact'' 7.

Sri Aurobindo said that old models and techniques used for revolution five years ago had become obsolete, since the first world war had begun and airplanes and sophisticated weaponry was being used by the state to crush any revolution across the world. He even said, how can the revolutionaries with country bombs and worn out rifles match air planes and modern machine guns. 8
By 1914, Sri Aurobindo had filled up twenty note books interpreting Indian scriptures, tradition and indology. It was later published in the journal Arya. But Sri Aurobindo’s political activity continued from behind. Viceroy Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy narrowly escaped an attack in Delhi in December 1912. Sri Aurobindo’s accomplice Motilal Roy had engaged his comrade Basanta Biswas to throw a bomb and kill the Viceroy Lord Hardinge. The bomb was carried from Chandennagore to Delhi. Hardinge narrowly escaped and was seriously injured. His attendant was killed.  

Sri Aurobindo shot off a letter to Motilal Roy using words like Trantric Kriya, Tantric Yoga and exercise in Smasan (Burning Ghat).

In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry, ```in these letters to Motilal, terms such as ```tantric instruments and tantric kriyas are code-words for revolutionary materials and activities. The ` Yogini Chakras’ mentioned, according to an associate of Motilal are revolvers that Motilal wanted Sri Aurobindo to send to Chandennagore via the French post’`. 
Sri Aurobindo wrote to Motilal in August 1912 "there are religious people who are openly mixed up with politics. We do not think it wise to send our purely religious Tantric instruments to any such. Kindly answer by return post. If the answer is satisfactory and we get the money promised, we will start sending Chakras'." 11

In January 1913, Sri Aurobindo signed a letter as 'Kali' and wrote to Motilal, "about Tantric Yoga your experiment in the smashana (burning ghat is a daring one, - but it seems to have been skilfully carried out and the success is highly gratifying'). Sri Aurobindo Ashram, had decodified the terms and found "this is apparently a reference to the attempt to assassinate the Viceroy, Lord Hardinge in Delhi on December 23 1912.' 12

Interestingly, between 1910-1914, Sri Aurobindo signed most letters to his political accomplices in Bengal and other places as 'Kali', the underground name he used during his revolutionary days in Bengal to avoid the British police.
He also used the name `Manik' \textsuperscript{13} when he practised automatic writing while editing the weekly \textit{Bande Mataram}. Records available in Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives show that on Sri Aurobindo’s 40\textsuperscript{th} birthday a secret revolutionary meeting was held in his house. He presided over the meeting and garlanded five pictures, three of which were revolutionaries, two of them being Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki. Both were accused trying to murder the district judge of Muzaffarpur, Douglas Kingsford. While Khudiram was caught and hanged, Prafulla committed suicide.

There are a few more instances of Sri Aurobindo’s getting engaged in politics while in Pondicherry, during the early years.

In a letter to Motilal Roy on July 3, 1912 Sri Aurobindo wrote that he lived in Pondicherry like a `political refugee'. Meanwhile, one Mr Denham reported in a local case at Rajabazar in Calcutta that two persons named Sisir Ghosh and Sudarshan Ghosh had paid a secret visit to Pondicherry and met Sri Aurobindo for some `political advice'. Sisir and Sudarshan stayed in Pondicherry for 20 days. \textsuperscript{14}
Similarly in a correspondence to Anandrao, Sri Aurobindo wrote, "my Beng
correspondent writes to me". Even after coming to Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo was maintaining direct political contacts with Bengal revolutionaries.

It is, of course, true that Sri Aurobindo was in crying need for money to maintain himself along with a few other comrades in revolution, who had accompanied him from Calcutta to Pondicherry. They are Suresh Chakravarty (Moni), Bejoy Nag, Saurin Bose (Mrinalini’s brother) and Biren. It could be that he was also maintaining contacts to gather money from his comrades in Calcutta and maintain a living in Pondicherry.

At the end of every letter Sri Aurobindo wrote, "please send the rest of this month’s money at once if you have not already sent it and next month’s as early as you can".

Sri Aurobindo had declared in no uncertain terms in 1912 in a letter to Anandrao, that he was not a Sannyasin. He said, "I have even made it clear enough in the Public Press that I have not taken Sannyasa but am practising Yoga as a householder, not even a
Brahmacharin. The Yoga I practise has not the ghost of a connection with Sannyasa. It is yoga that is meant for life and life only and its object is perfection of the moral condition and mental and physical being along with the possession of certain powers - the truth of which I have been establishing by continuous practical experiment - with the object of carrying out certain mission in life which God has given me. Therefore there is or ought to be no difficulty on that score. If I were a Sannyasin then there would indeed be no money difficulty to solve''. 17

From the above letter it is very clear that there were no reasons to believe that Sri Aurobindo had quit politics forever as he had become a saint or a sage who had forgotten life or taken political exile as his devotees and disciples would like to see him.

It is even more interesting to note that Sri Aurobindo had even decided to return to Bengal. In a letter written in June 1912, to Anandrao he said, "The full application of Yoga might take three years or more...I believe I will have to stay in French India for another year. I presume that is what is the question of my future. But I cannot say it for certain.'', 18
During this first phase Sri Aurobindo directly involved himself in local politics around Pondicherry. He tried desperately to ensure a win for Paul Richard, to the French Chamber of Deputies. Paul was a French mystic and occultist who had come over to India with an assignment from the French government and had married Mira Al Fassa, or Mira Richard who would be the Mother of Pondicherry Ashram in the later periods.

Directly, there could be two reasons behind such a move. Sri Aurobindo might have wanted to get a close friendship with Paul and plan a future settlement in France or it could be his very own way of once again getting engaged in politics, that he quit voluntarily after he left British India in 1910. Even today, there are some unconfirmed rumours among scholars approaching Sri Aurobindo that Paul might have promised him with some money for his safe stay in Pondicherry.
In a series of letters to his Bengal comrade Motilal Roy, Sri Aurobindo points out the necessity of involving Bengalis of Chandennagore in supporting Paul to win the elections. To do that he even goes to the extent of criticising one of his old and most trusted comrade Devavrata, whom he holds almost equivalent to him in spiritual matters but finds Devavrata taking the wrong route for the moment and misutilising his spiritual force. After Sri Aurobindo’s departure, Devavrata joined Ramakrishna Mission. According to Sri Aurobindo, ‘Ramakrishna Mission’ had committed the error of churches as it adopted the form of their gurus.

From different letters it is apparent that Sri Aurobindo was passing through a ‘dangerous phase’ during the initial years in Pondicherry. He wrote twenty-seven letters where he signed as ‘Kali’, the secret revolutionary name, some times ‘A.K’ possibly indicating ‘Aurobindo Kali’, A.G meaning Aurobindo Ghosh and G indicating Ghosh.

One such letter was in June 1914. Here A. K is terribly agitated and chastises Motilal for using a a foul and undecorous word
used to describe Sri Aurobindo's past activities. Sri Aurobindo says, it is 'shocking'. Here he warns Motilal against writing his life as he feels, "it is a very difficult task for there is very little one can write without offending people, like S Mullick, B Pal, S S Chakravarty and revealing party secrets'. Motilal had written to Bejoy Nag, yet another accomplice and fellow comrade of Sri Aurobindo living with him in Pondicherry. 22

On 29 August 1914, Sri Aurobindo's engagement in politics seems to come to a full circle, when he openly counters Mahatma Gandhi's ways of politics. He says, "we gain nothing by preaching unconditional loyalty to the government... or doing anything in appearance which strengthens the disposition towards an abject and unmanly tone in politics. Gandhi's loyalty is not a pattern for India, which is not South Africa.' 23

In Sri Aurobindo's opinion an abject tone of servility in politics is not 'diplomacy' and is not 'good politics'. To him what
Gandhi was attempting in South Africa isn’t a self-identity for Indians but to secure a position of kindly treated serfs.

Thus it is apparent that the revolutionary in Sri Aurobindo is not lost, even after he had claimed a spiritual refuge in Pondicherry. He always felt that India’s position was different from South Africa and therefore was quietly opposed to Mahatma Gandhi’s policies. At a later stage in 1920 he even requested Swami Vivekananda’s brother Bhupendranath Datta ‘not to make a fetish of Gandhi’s policy of non-violence, as it rebelled against the Indian concept. 23

Sri Aurobindo was totally opposed to the life of an ascetic or belief in the concept of self-sacrifice. In this letter addressed to Motilal on August 29, 1914, he wrote, ‘‘I don’t appreciate Sarat Maharaj’s (Swami Saradananda) position. If self-sacrifice is the object, every human being has the whole of life as a field of self-sacrifice and does not depend on any government for that. We can show our sacrificing activities every moment, any time we want. It is not a question of sacrifice at all, it is a question of military training’’. 24 In details one would be astonished to find how
skillfully he deals political matters arising out of the first world war and places them against his own politico-spiritual analysis.

His opposition against ascetism and open proclaim for an ideal human unity, harmony and free thinking is evident from yet another correspondence he sends to Motilal sometime after October 1914. Here he uses phrases enough to animate the traditional Indian religio-spiritual fabric.

He says, "Every ascetic movement since the time of Buddha has left India weaker and for a very obvious reason. Renunciation of life is one thing, to make life itself, national, individual, world life greater and more divine is another. You cannot enforce one ideal on the country without weakening the other."

Sri Aurobindo had been consistently pursuing how his type of thinking and unconventional yoga could produce effects on the objective world. But at every step of his politics he mixes up his spiritual thinking trying to link it to attain perfection of body and mind. Therefore he wrote to his friend Parthasarathi Iyengar, "be careful to follow my instructions in avoiding old kind of politics."
Spirituality is India’s only politics, the fulfilment of Sanatan Dharma its only Swaraj’.

Sri Aurobindo’s vehement opposition to traditional religious and spiritual issues are revealed when he heavily criticises Motilal Roy for trying to set up an ‘Aurobindo Math’ probably on lines with Ramakrishna Math and Mission. To such an effort Sri Aurobindo said in his letter of October 1914, ‘‘It is contagion that seems have caught you and rages in Bengal. You must understand my mission is not to create maths, ascetics and sannyasins, but to call back the souls of strong to the Lila of Krishna and Kali. That is my teaching. It should never be connected with monastic forms or monastic ideals.’’

Many years later on 8 November 1982, a high powered five-member Constitutional Bench of the Supreme Court led by Chief Justice Y V Chandrachud ruled, ‘‘neither is Sri Aurobindo a saint or an ascetic. Nor are his followers a religious body or denomination. Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy speaks of India’s highest aspiration and
vision.

This phase witnessed Sri Aurobindo receiving a number of visitors, most being revolutionaries. There is some evidence to prove that Sri Aurobindo had supported the revolutionaries fighting British police under the leadership of Jatindranath Mukherjee (‘Bagha Jatin’) on the banks of Buribalam river at Balasore in Orissa. This is because after Bagha Jatin’s death, Sri Aurobindo said, ‘‘he was one of my trusted lieutenants, a wonderful man who would belong to the front rank of humanity, such beauty and strength combined in one, I have not seen. His stature was like that of a warrior’’. 28

Most visitors who came to see Sri Aurobindo were trailed by the C.I.D and detective department. What the visitors discussed internally with Sri Aurobindo was never revealed, but it could well be understood there were political discussions and feedbacks and the British intelligence could well imagine how Sri Aurobindo continued to render expert advice on political matters, but only failed to gather evidence and proof against Sri Aurobindo that might be enough to deport him to some place outside British India. Sri Aurobindo’s
attitude towards Motilal was a matter of concern for British intelligence. To any act of terrorism or revolutionary activity Sri Aurobindo always said, "it is not wise to check things when they had taken a strong shape. Something good may also come out of them."  

With the murder of Archduke Franz Ferdinand in Sarajevo, Austria, the First World War started in 1914. Sri Aurobindo immediately became politically alert. From his student days he had a wish to see Alsace-Lorraine in France becoming free of German occupation. The opportunity had arrived through the First World War. It seemed that Sri Aurobindo was a confirmed Francophile and had even admitted that France was his second motherland after India. The war came to India in September 1914, when the German crusie Emden destroyed fifteen British ships and shelled Madras, (now Chennai) and made Pondicherry its next target. Many decided to leave Pondicherry but Sri Aurobindo refused to move.
The British rulers were however happy that Sri Aurobindo had decided not to leave Pondicherry. They felt, if he left Pondicherry, he would return to Bengal and British India. There were some correspondences between the British rulers on the possible protection that needs to be taken if Sri Aurobindo returns to Bengal and British India. One such correspondence said, "if that happens he would certainly move to Bengal and be received with enthusiasm. It was too great a risk. There we should make suitable arrangements for watching him in Pondicherry". 32

In 1914, Sri Aurobindo again wrote to Motilal on the possible outcome of World War I. He said, "three things are sure to happen, a) Germany will be defeated, b) Britain will become weak and isolated from rest of the world and c) Britain will be finally defeated after the war. He was sure that the second and third result would benefit India. In either of these two last cases an invasion of India by Germany, Russia or Japan is only a question of time. India could profit from the war by giving limited co-operation to the British in exchange for military training and other concessions. But he told Motilal Nehru, to co-operate to the extent suggested by
Mahatma Gandhi also gave a lengthy interview in `The Hindu' newspaper making his political views public on the outcome of the First World War. Unfortunately most of what he said proved wrong. Neither Japan nor Russia invaded India.

In December 1914 an Extremist Conference was also held in Madras (Chennai) and his views were printed in The Hindu newspaper. By then, the Extremists had become a moribund and useless body. Sri Aurobindo said, `it was mere repetition of petty and lifeless formulas of the past, hardly showing any sense of great breath of the future that is blowing on us. The old and petty forms and little narrow, make-believe activities of politics are getting out of date. The world is changing and preparing for more colossal changes...no nation in modern times can grow great by politics alone. A rich and varied life, energetic in all its parts is the condition of a sound, vigorous national existense.'

Sri Aurobindo spent his first four years in Pondicherry surrounded by political personalities from Southern India and Bengal. The British police
was correct in their assessment that Sri Aurobindo was maintaining active contacts with his political counterparts from Bengal and was advising them from behind. However, the police failed to prove their suspicion. Even during his practical revolutionary days in Bengal between 1906 and 1910, the British police had failed to prove any charge against Sri Aurobindo. He was always successful in slipping out of the clutches of the British police.

In Pondicherry academic studies and work was only a part time pleasure for Sri Aurobindo. It is, of course true that he had filled up twenty note books with Indological issues within this period. It was nothing new for him. In Bengal he was a literary revolutionary, where he edited four political journals and newspapers. Through those journals and newspapers he propagated Indian spirituality and religion to reach the masses.

It was the easiest way to catch the imagination of a spiritual race. He knew that by nature, Indians were religious and in a non-classical and unconventional way to arouse the national sentiment within the Indian masses. It could well be termed as a type
of jingoism and for a very limited period Sri Aurobindo was successful.

The second phase (1914 – 1920)

Between 1914 and 1920 a number of major political developments took place in India. As usual, Sri Aurobindo reacted to some political events and offered his observations. However he kept absolute silence on extreme exploitation and massacres by British rulers of Indians. The major events that he ignored and kept quiet are the Jallianwala Bagh Tragedy (1919) and the draconian Rowlatt Act (1919) that took away the personal freedom from all Indians. It is yet not known, why Sri Aurobindo kept quiet and did not protest while the whole world and India was fuming against British rule for committing the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

The other political events that took place during this period are a) end of World War I (1918), b) signing of the Lucknow Pact between the Indian National Congress and Muslim League (1916), c) announcement of the Montague declaration promising responsible
government (1917), d) start of the third Aglo-Afghan war and India joining the League of Nations (1919) and e) beginning of the non-co-operation movement, Khilafat movement and finally the emergence of Mahatma Gandhi in Indian political scene (1920).

During this period Sri Aurobindo wrote exhaustively in the monthly journal Arya. The journal kept publishing between August 1914 and January 1921. In the Arya Sri Aurobindo reinterpreted Indology and Indian scriptures like the Vedas and the Upanishads. But most of it was socio-spiritual in nature with an overtone of political vibration.

In this phase Sri Aurobindo also laid the foundation of his integral yoga. But most of the public attention was drawn towards his writings like The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity and War and Self Determination. He completed writing on these issues between 1916 and July 1918. The writings proved his long-term vision of society, economy, politics, individual, state and community.

During this period his former comrades Upendranath Banerjee and Hrishikesh Kanjilal visited Pondicherry to persuade him to rejoin practical politics. They had been released from Andaman Jails after remaining there for over a decade. Sri Aurobindo’s brother Barindra
Kumar Ghosh also came to settle down in Pondicherry after he was released from Andaman Jail in Port Blair (Andamans). Convicted in Alipore Bomb Case he was banished and incarcerated in the penal colony of Andamans from 1909.

In the evening they used to discuss political issues with Sri Aurobindo and put cross political questions to him to extract his political views. By doing so they had plans of luring and involving Sri Aurobindo in active and direct politics. But they failed miserably. Sri Aurobindo answered most of their question but never felt that he should get involved in practical politics to carry out his ideas and suggestions.

Similar attempts were made by other leaders like Balakrishna Sivaram Moonje when he offered Sri Aurobindo to become the President at the Nagpur session (1920) of the Indian National Congress party. Barindra too made this attempt but failed to influence his brother. Barin’s considered rival but Sri Aurobindo’s close associate, Motilal Roy even announced through his paper ‘Standard Bearer’ that
Sri Aurobindo would soon return from self-exile and re-enter politics by February or March 1922.

In November 1920 an agitated and frowning Sri Aurobindo wrote back to Motilal Roy not to air his political views without his sanction. Motilal posed that he was Sri Aurobindo’s spiritual agent and had therefore taken the liberty of announcing in his paper Standard Bearer that Sri Aurobindo would soon return to rejoin practical politics. Such views were also expressed in another paper called Janmabhumi. Roy’s paper claimed that Sri Aurobindo was openly supporting Montague-Chelmsford reforms and was opposed to Mahatma Gandhi’s non-co-operation movement.

Sri Aurobindo failed to hold back his anger and emotion and shot off a letter to Roy that he had not identified himself with such a position and was solely engaged to reconstitute India’s cultural, social and economic life within the larger and freer lines than the past on a spiritual basis, in his very own and odd ways.
Interestingly, it is noticed from the letters that Sri Aurobindo wrote to Motilal Roy and Barindra Kumar Ghosh that he gets restless and agitated whenever he is dragged into any practical political issue. It could be that he did not like anybody laying his finger on his very own and created 'pleasure zone' of politics. Sri Aurobindo always wanted to prove that he had voluntarily withdrawn from politics and therefore he should be voluntarily allowed to stay or leave it. He disliked persons interfering in his personal matter. Politics for him was highly personal.

He was very conservative on political matters and any one who would touch on him was not to be spared. His sensitivity towards politics and political issues were highly pronounced. It is evident from the letters that he had written to different newspapers between 1911 to 1925.

Motilal Roy was both a spiritual agent and a political conduit of Sri Aurobindo. Roy constantly kept pestering Sri Aurobindo to return to active politics but failed to convince him. He gave up his endeavour sometime in 1922.
At the time of Lucknow Pact (1916) signed between the Congress and Muslim League Sri Aurobindo was too busy writing indological articles for Arya. But he was aware of the creation of a separate political platform for Muslims. It is not known whether he liked it or not. But during the later stages he had offered his comments and observations on how the British rulers were likely to use the League to divide and weaken the country. He had warned Chittaranjan Das about it and later tried his level best to persuade the Congress leadership accept the offer of Cripps Mission (1942) and the Cabinet Mission Plan (1946) in order to stop the creation of two dominions on religious basis. These issues will be dealt in the third and fourth phase of Sri Aurobindo’s political activity.

In 1918 the famous ‘Rowlatt Report’ was published. It was the digest of the secret reports of revolutionary activities of previous years. It devoted some paras on Sri Aurobindo’s article on Bhawani Mandir and the activities of the Maniktala group involved in the Alipore Bomb case. During this period the British intelligence also came out with a report called ‘The Politico – Criminal Who’s
Who — A where Sri Aurobindo figured prominently. By 1917, British intelligence had published three secret reports, emphasizing Sri Aurobindo’s importance in the history of terrorism.

In British eyes Sri Aurobindo was a `terrorist' and remained so until his death in 1950. One of those secret reports concludes, ``The figure of Arabinda Ghosh, now in Pondicherry, is said still to loom large behind Bengal anarchy. He has certainly been in written communication with some of the revolutionary members since the commencement of the war’’. To stop reckless gang robberies by revolutionaries and political dacoities, the British government passed the Defence of India Act in 1919. The revolutionary organizations involved in the subversive activities were the descendants of the secret organizations formed by Sri Aurobindo in 1902. Therefore the British felt that Sri Aurobindo was actively supporting these organizations from behind. British intelligence reports claimed that these organizations praised Sri Aurobindo in public and ``` it is stated by persons in a position to know that Arabinda in his retreat in Pondicherry is to the present day in receipt of funds especially
provided by the Dacca Anusilan Samity. These funds were collected at
gunpoint in Bengal, as armed robbery was the Samiti’s principal means
of fundraising'.

Sri Aurobindo was very agitated with Roy’s ways of
thinking in bringing him back to regular politics. In a letter written
sometime end 1919, Sri Aurobindo went to the extent of calling the
concept of ‘Uthara Yogi’ as ‘Bujruki’ in Bengali (meaning deceit in
English). Advising Roy on how to run the newly launched ‘Standard
Bearer’ weekly English newspaper, Sri Aurobindo said, ‘’I am not
favourably inclined to the Uttara Yogi idea, nor is anyone else here.
It sounds like the old spiritual pretension and when it is put in a
current English production, it suggests bujruki’ (deceit)

In Sri Aurobindo’s opinion ‘’Indian spirituality has
lost itself in a jungle of symbols and shlokas and we have to get on
them on to the plain and straight ways and the open heights where we
can see much work that has still to be done‘. Sri Aurobindo cloaked

spirituality in the socio - political attire and presented it for a
bigger service towards humanity. He makes this clear in the letter
when he says, ``Let the Shakti herself be the Editor''. Given his classical and highly fundamental ways of thinking Sri Aurobindo laid excessive stress on symbols. Shakti for him was the symbol of humanity, society, community, strength, perseverance and consummate energy. It could only be derived by getting engaged in socio-political affairs around and then brushing it up with psycho-socio and politico-spiritual ideas.

On Jan 2 1920, he wrote an interesting letter to Motilal and said, ``I do not see, if Lajpat Rai is coming to India, how they can object to my going to Bengal. But allowed or not allowed I have not the least intention of doing that at present or for another year at the earliest. When I do go back to Bengal this or that circumstance will make no difference. Mr Gandhi, like the man in Macedonia with St Paul, sent me a message to come ``over and help'', but I had to say that I was not ready to join in the old politics and had no new programme formed for a more spiritual line of work and it would be of no use my going out till I saw my way''.

It seems that Sri Aurobindo had always wanted to come back to Bengal and rejoin politics under more favourable
circumstances. The British rulers did not give him the opportunity. Again it could be the case that by then he might have lost all interest as his wife Mrinalini had passed away and there was nobody so strong to pull him back to British India and Bengal and resume practical political activity.  

Although the non-cooperation movement and the Khilafat agitation took shape in 1920, Sri Aurobindo did not offer elaborate observations before 1923 and 1924. Only sometime in November or December 1920, Sri Aurobindo made some comments supporting Khilafat movement. The comments were made during a discussion he had with his followers and disciples. Sri Aurobindo said, ``we have qualified sympathy for the movements. Sympathy is there because we have the same objective. It is qualified because we feel that the basis is not sound. The Punjab martial law and atrocities, the Khilafat are there and non-cooperation is based on those wrongs...India wants freedom because of herself, because of her own spirit. I would very much like India to find her own Swaraj and then, like Ireland to work out her salvation, even with violence – preferably without violence. Our basis must be broader than that of mere opposition to the British
government...We must look to ourselves rather than always focus on British actions for our own free nation-hood’.

Sri Aurobindo’s engagement in politics is evident from the remark. In this quote he goes to the extent of justifying violence to achieve the objective of freedom. However, he withdraws immediately realizing that such violent statements could only place him in problem if they are leaked out. But it is sure that the anarchist or extremist in him was still alive even ten years after he claimed to have quit practical politics.

Sometime in the early months of 1919 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi emerged on the Indian scene. He was soon to be proclaimed as a ‘Mahatma’ by his followers. Gandhi started his fight against the Rowlatt Act (1919). Soon the Jallianwallah Bagh tragedy took place in Amritsar. Hundreds were killed. Quite surprisingly Sri Aurobindo did not offer his comments on this ghastly tragedy. Gandhi planned to launch the non-co-operation movement from 1 August 1920. Before that he sent his son Devdas to meet Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry and take his advice. He also wanted that Sri Aurobindo should lead the country’s freedom movement. Sri Aurobindo refused. The day Gandhi launched the non-cooperation movement B.G. Tilak
died. The whole country was waiting for Sri Aurobindo to lead the freedom movement. Sri Aurobindo was offered the post of Congress President at the party’s upcoming Nagpur session (1920). Sri Aurobindo refused to accept the offer and said ``since my retirement from British India I have developed an outlook and views which have diverged a great deal from those I held at the time of 1906-1910 and, as they are remote from present actualities and do not follow the present stream of political action, I should find myself very much embarrassed as to what to say to the Congress... the President of the Congress is really a mouthpiece of the Congress and to make from the Presidential chair a purely personal pronouncement miles away from what Congress is thinking and doing would be grotesquely out of place’’. Since his arrival from Cambridge in 1893, Sri Aurobindo was always against any form of Congress politics.

To avoid political offers and overtures from friends and accomplices he even announced, ‘‘I am no longer first and foremost a politician’’. He, however, advised his old comrade from the revolutionary Jugantar group of Bengal Bhupendranath Datta, brother of
Swami Vivekananda, what he thought of the non-cooperation movement. A number of hard core revolutionaries had also joined the movement. Sri Aurobindo was hardly impressed with such type of movements. He told Datta, "do not make a fetish of the movement but try to take advantage of it and develop his own lines". In Sri Aurobindo's opinion revolutionary violence had no longer a future in India with the introduction of airplanes and other military hardware. The weapons used by terrorists to fight British rule had been rendered obsolete and defunct. Sri Aurobindo said, the earlier model of revolt was European and imitative. 50

On the other hand Sri Aurobindo opposed Gandhi's form of non-violence and said, "it is an instrument for getting beaten with joy". In Sri Aurobindo's opinion Gandhi was suffering from an obsession with the charkha or hand-spinning of cotton. He said that the non-cooperation movement was bound to end "in great confusion or great fiasco". A year and half later Gandhi was forced to call of the non-cooperation movement. Sri Aurobindo said, "I was wrong. It ended in confusion and fiasco". 51
It could be that since ideal conditions never cropped up that Sri Aurobindo did not return. But his love for politics always remained with him. Sri Aurobindo’s letter to Barin in April 1920 that his ‘yoga would end in another two years’ allowed many to speculate on his returning to British India and fight for her freedom.

In 1919, Sri Aurobindo’s student and a founder-member of the Communist Party of India (C.P.I), Manabendranath Roy (M.N.Roy), earlier known as Narendra Nath Bhattacharya, also tried to persuade Sri Aurobindo to return to practical politics. There are unconfirmed reports that in 1919 Roy wrote to Sri Aurobindo to assume the leadership of the Indian Communist Party after he received the necessary clearance from V. I. Lenin whom he met through Michael Borodin in Russia.

Roy attended the Third Communist International in 1919 as a member of the Mexican Communist Party. The letter ‘unsigned’ and speculated to have been written by Roy is claimed to have been salvaged by Surendra Mohan Ghosh, from the National Archives. It is
beleived that British Intelligence had intercepted the letter and suppressed it.

There are different opinions on the existense of this letter. Eminent historian Amalendu De said, "it was unsigned and is only suspected to have been written by M N Roy addressing Sri Aurobindo. It is not confirmed", 53 (Journal of Asiatic Society, Vol XLV, No.1 2003)

Sri Aurobindo publicized his political views in letters to some newspapers. On August 10 1918, Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to Annie Besant, leading the Home Rule movement, where he almost dejustified the movement and said, "we have a fair number of political wise men of this type, among us, but no home rule leader surely can stultify himself to that extent." He said that the Home Rule movement was a Chinese puzzle. 54
The third phase (1920 – 1928)

Twenty-two years ago in 1906 Sri Aurobindo raised the demand for India’s complete political Independence from British rule with the leaders of Indian National Congress. Moderate Congress leaders like Gopal Krishna Gokhale held him as a mad person and declared, ``only madmen outside lunatic asylums could think or talk of Independence’’. In 1929, Sri Aurobindo’s demand took shape. The Indian National Congress adopted the resolution for ‘Purna Swaraj’ at its Lahore session. The same year Simon Commission arrived in India and Motilal Nehru placed his political report at the Karachi Congress (1931) where he endorsed the demand for complete political Independence for India.

The non-cooperation movement led by Gandhi reached its peak between 1920 and 1922 and then fizzled out in 1923. Sri Aurobindo had been keenly watching the developments. He made his observations and suggestions on these issues during evening discussions with his disciples and followers between 1923 and 1926.
These discussions later came to be known as 'Evening Talks' recorded by his follower and accomplice, A B Purani.  

The other major political events that took place during this period of eight years were the Montagu-Chelmsford Reforms that introduced 'Dyarchy' in the provinces. Sri Aurobindo made his observations on the possible outcome of these reforms. In 1925, Congress leaders like Purushottam Das Tandon and Lala Lajpat Rai with Hindu Mahasabha leanings met him. They sought his participation to establish Hindu supremacy in India. Sri Aurobindo found their ideas somewhat 'obnoxious and not acceptable'. He is believed to have told them that the concept of Hindu supremacy was without base and that there were 'no Muslims in India'.

He held detailed political discussions with Dr Nihalchand Krishnadas, another Hindu Mahasabha leader, Purushottam Das Tandon and Lala Lajpat Rai for forty-five minutes. The Hindu Mahasabha was formed in 1921. Later it led to the formation of Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (RSS) in 1925.
Until 1920 Sri Aurobindo was the most sought after Indian leader. Tilak passed away on 1 August 1920. The obvious choice fell on Sri Aurobindo to lead the nation.

Sri Aurobindo was not willing to accept the responsibility. He preferred to give advice and suggestions from behind. Moreover, his ways of political thinking and action were totally different from the views of the Congress leaders. Sri Aurobindo dealt politics at a non-physical and ethereal level. To him politics was a mental concept which had to be acted upon on the basis of a call from within.

Sri Aurobindo wanted that his ideas should get implemented. However, that was impossible to achieve unless he rejoined practical politics. Sri Aurobindo believed in the mythical concept of `nishkama karma' or desire-free action. It was a type of fantasy. He might have deliberately created this fantasy to keep himself away from direct political interference and overtures sent to him by different political leaders.
This is proved from a very interesting correspondence between him and Motilal Roy in May 1920. There he says, "the old politics in India persist in a chaos of parties and programmes centred round the quarrel within the Congress and reforms and in Bengal we have a rush of the commercial and industrial spirit, which follow the Western principle and if it succeeds on those lines will produce a disastrous reproduction or imitation of the European situation with its corrupt capitalism and labour struggle and the war of classes." 61

It seems that Sri Aurobindo is thinking in Marxist terms. But not quite so. Right through his life he had a soft corner for Marxist thoughts and terminologies and ways of thinking and was the first person to use the word 'bourgeois and proletariat' 62

At every step Sri Aurobindo distances himself from the chaotic political situation prevailing in the country. He then somewhat habitually enters the abstract world of spirituality, the divided self, self knowledge and the types to free his thinking from the chaos. Sri Aurobindo by nature was always a back bench holder. He never led from the front although he had all the necessary
qualities of doing so and probably at that point there was none in India barring Bal Gangadhar Tilak to match his eloquent and waxing qualities of outstanding verbiose.

It could be that such reticence, transmutism lay in his family roots. He passed through insufficient and tiring conditions and obviously faced anxious moments in his life, although he never declared them in the open, barring a few. His statement that ‘‘my life was not on the surface to see’’ could be used as a very big testimony to those anxious and insufferable moments he underwent in England and in the family. His inner pain was never revealed. There are no specific explanations.

He remained in politics in a subdued way. He points out that the chaotic political condition is an advantage for him and those around as it is the very reverse of his ideal. It provides him with a breathing space of not going back directly to politics and yet remain in it far away from British India in Pondicherry. But his mind remains linked to all that his happening in Bengal and around in the political field. He encourages Roy to set up a Sangha that can lead young people around and spread ideas.
He says, ``we should throw our spirit and idea upon this fermentation and draw what is best among its personalities and forces to the side of our ideal so as to get a hold and a greater mass of effectuation.''

Then he makes a remarkable point, ``the more perfect coordination of all activities and all who are at work can only come, as far as I can see, after I myself go to Bengal and act by my direct presence'’.  

His longing for coming back to Bengal is once again revealed. It could be that he was not willing to join direct politics, but it is also true that he was not aware of any socio-spiritual institution that could have survived without participation from greater politics.

In this way, each time Sri Aurobindo suppresses his desire of returning to direct action in the social and political field. Although he had the opportunity to fulfil it, he purposely stayed away, the perfect reasons only remaining best known to him.
As it seems that his love for spirituality was only in the garb of a new type of political scientist or a political theorist.

The Gaya Congress session took place in December 1922. Sri Aurobindo wrote a letter to C R Das, his counsell and advocate in the Alipore Bomb case, highlighting why Gandhi’s programme could not bring about genuine freedom for the country and establish its vastness. He also felt that his friend Tilak’s form of nationalism, which he had accepted even a decade ago was ‘outdated’. As for his own policy he said, ‘it is radically different from Tilak and Gandhi. But the country is not ready for it. So he prefers to work from a spiritual and psychic plane’. 65

He never announced the policy. It remained hazy and obscure. But he always carried a wish to see it getting implemented under ‘proper conditions’. It seems Sri Aurobindo, until the end, might not have derived a concrete direction of politics or form or struggle that could lead India to freedom. But he always carried a subtle wish.
Sri Aurobindo sought on a merger of his outer life with his inner life but remained somewhat confused how to convince the people of this country and its political leaders that without a radical change in their consciousness 'true freedom' is a mirage and can never be achieved.

While Sri Aurobindo discussed abstract political thoughts and ideals linking it to value, mythology, psychology and other social scientific disciplines, the people of India were getting restless to achieve political freedom from British rule. It is quite natural that such abstract political ideas could be discussed and dealt at length living in a non-British French enclave. Sri Aurobindo had ample time to muse over non-issues and abstract philosophical concepts, while Congress leaders carried the responsibility on their head to bring freedom to India.

Therefore, India’s achieving of political, administrative and economic freedom did not fit into Sri Aurobindo’s views as he felt it never offered permanent solutions to man and humanity as it does not show the path to free thinking and emancipation of the soul in man.
In 1920, Sri Aurobindo received two offers. One from Joseph Baptista to join his Social Democratic Party and become the Editor of his party’s newly launched newspaper. The second offer was from B.S. Moonje to become the President of the Indian National Congress at its Nagpur session in December 1920.

Sri Aurobindo refused both offers and provided some vague answers to avoid the entire issue. He had the option of not to reply to either of the offers. But he didn’t. He wanted to make his political views known and thereby remain connected to political issues on a daily basis.

An in-depth study of the two letters written to Baptista and Moonje reveals his concern and awareness about political affairs in India and abroad. He deals at length on the issue while trying to justify and excuse for himself.

This requires a probe. Any person disinterested in politics could have easily finished off the answer in a single sentence or by pointing out that he has lost all interest in such affairs. Sri Aurobindo did not do that. He dealt in detail the political situation prevailing in India and across the globe and yet
why he should remain out of it. That, precisely, is the way he remains engaged in politics every day and each time.

In the letters he tried to say that he has finished his work for India’s independence and the slogan that he raised in 1906 for a politically free and unified India had already received seal at the Amritsar Congress (1919). Actually, it came true in 1929 in the Lahore session of the Congress party.

Whatever the outcome, he remained connected to politics. For him, talking politics, dealing with politics and living in politics was a pleasure object. Sri Aurobindo remained connected to life, earth, people, society and humanity through politics that he defined in his own way.

It could be weird, it could be odd, but he remained in it with pleasure, not to be disturbed as he said, in the letter to Baptista, `I came to Pondicherry to have (possibly enjoy) freedom and tranquility for a fixed object having nothing to do with the present politics — in which I took no direct part after coming here....though what I can do for the country I have constantly done and until it is accomplished it is not possible for me to resume any kind of public activity’’.
In material terms, he never spelt out what he wanted to do for the country. He, however, said that he does not look down on politics or political action or consider that he had got over them. He said, "I have always laid a dominant stress (on politics) but now lay an entire stress on the spiritual life......it is not an ascetic ideal or disgust of secular things. All human activity is a thing to be included in the spiritual and the importance of politics at the present time is very great'.'

Here again he spelt out his suppressed and long-lasting wish, the one similar to 'going back to the mother's womb' when he said, "If I were in British India, I should be obliged to plunge at once into action of different kinds'.' He hinted at active politics and participation.

In an undated fragmentary draft letter found by the Sri Aurobindo Ashram Archives, Pondicherry, and possibly written around this time Sri Aurobindo rues and laments, "my scope of action (political and direct) is very limited. I am an exile in French India, in danger of arrest or internment if I step across the border. I have
long abstained from all intermiscence in politics and anything I may say, write or do now would be misunderstood by the Government. They regard me, I believe, as an arch revolutionary and irreconcilable; any assertion of mine to the contrary would be regarded probably as camouflage or covert for unvowable designs. Nor could I engage to satisfy them by my utterances or action. I would necessarily have to speak and act from the point of view of Indian aspiration to liberty and this is a thing they still regard as objectionable.''.

Going through the above piece one would easily understand how keen was Sri Aurobindo in getting directly involved in politics and action, but only could not do it as he felt the colonial masters would not spare him under all circumstances. So his stay in Pondicherry was more of a strategy and compulsion while his mind lived in British India craving for political participation. He was a victim of circumstances.

He, himself said, in the letter to Baptista, "I understand up to last September 1919, the Government of Bengal (and probably the Government of Madras) were totally opposed to my return to British
India ...if I went back I would be interned or imprisoned under one or
the other of the beneficient Acts''. 71

Such was the shock, that he said in the letter, ``even if I
were assured of an entirely free action and free movement, I should
yet not go just now''. 72 So for him it was a two way pleasure,

remaining outside British India and enjoying indirect political favour
from French India. His love for mixing up politics with spirituality
grew intense remaining in French India, although it is not known what
wonderful political and social and literary achievements he could have
presented had he remained in British India. Pondicherry was his second
place of love as was spirituality.

In this period Sri Aurobindo’s search for the divine assumed
new dimensions in `visvamanbata’ (world humanity). He never used the
term divinity or god meaning god-heads, transcendental dieties,
spirituality or religion. It was something more noble and far
expansive than one could generally believe and understand but it
remained restricted only to Sri Aurobindo’s understanding. His
disciples and devotees, however, accept that his thoughts and ways of
thinking were only understood by the Mother (Mira Richard) and there might have been an occult transference of power. To Sri Aurobindo, Mother Mira was Shakti, the store-house of knowledge, power and supreme consciousness.

In June 1923, C R Das met Sri Aurobindo in Pondicherry. The two discussed political issues at length. The biggest problem before them was the unity of Hindus and Muslims. Sri Aurobindo and Das were of the opinion that the problem had to be resolved before the British rulers left India. Otherwise, Sri Aurobindo felt "there will be civil war". 72

Almost quarter century later in 1946, Sri Aurobindo's prophecies came true. India was partitioned. One million had perished and 10 million were forced to abandon their homes. In September 1923 Das wrote to Sri Aurobindo and insisted on allowing him to publish his political views before the Gaya session of the Congress. Sri Aurobindo turned down the request. Das was heart-broken. He lost the Congress organization elections and Gandhi emerged as the majority leader. Das formed the Swarajya Party in 1923. It was a forum within the Congress
and functioned in high spirits till 1925. With Das’s unexpected death in 1925 the Swarajya Party died a natural death.

Before that in September 1923, Das sought Sri Aurobindo’s official endorsement on the emerging civil war like situation. Sri Aurobindo again refused. Thereafter Das broke off his connections with Sri Aurobindo for ever.

During this period there were reports in the press that Gandhi had sought Sri Aurobindo’s help and leadership. Sri Aurobindo had defeated the Englishmen at their own game through his intellectual mastery and wonderful and mellifluous English. The English went aghast.

The Anglo-Indian press rumbled, whatever tall might be Sri Aurobindo’s intellectual capacity, undoubtedly he was the ‘most violent man’ that British India had witnessed until then. Then how can he be called back into British India. It will spell disaster. Sri Aurobindo remained silent.

Sri Aurobindo treated the Anglo-Indian Times of India newspaper’s observation on Gandhi and him as a passing remark without
any 'real value'. This is because he never approved of the fetish worship of non-violence and non-cooperation practised by Gandhi. Moreover, he always said that Gandhi’s politics of ‘charkha’ has its own importance, but it can never bring Swaraj (complete political Independence) to India. 74

Sometime during 1926, Sri Aurobindo made a marvellous political observation, ```the lust of Indian politicians will infinitely grow every day and will not cease even after we get swaraj or freedom'``. 75

In the 1920s the Indian National Congress was passing through a critical phase. The Swarajists had become immensely vocal. Sri Aurobindo had always held that he never belonged to Congress. In the early stages he even said, that ```Indian National Congress is every thing but national’’. He hinted that Congress was anti-national, but only did not say it explicitly.

Now in Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo was a keen follower of all that was going on within the Congress, constantly instructing C R
Das and writing political letters to his brother Barin Ghosh, who had just been released from Andamans and had settled down with his `Sejda' (Sri Aurobindo was the third brother in lineage).

All this shows that he was a political person who had voluntarily accepted the life of a `spiritual fugitive', which he himself claimed in his third person answers to his followers and disciples in the book `On Himself.

Sri Aurobindo’s engagement in politics came a full circle until such time Motilal Roy and C R Das maintained regular contacts. By 1923, all of it was gone. After a peeved Das and Roy severed connection, politically Sri Aurobindo had become alone. This was primarily due to Sri Aurobindo’s obstinacy in not returning to British India and leading the country towards freedom.

It seemed that Sri Aurobindo wanted to remain a self-styled enigma, expressing very little of what people across the country thought or said of him. He had decided to walk alone surrounded by a few of his accomplices at Pondicherry.

Unfortunately, persons and accomplices who came to live with him in Pondicherry after he departed from Bengal in 1910 had also
started leaving him. During this period a new group started surrounding him. He continued his political dialogues and discussions with them. A B Purani had recorded these discussions in his book `Evening Talks`. The notings were done in two phases from 1923 – 1926 and then again from 1938 – 1950.

In the first phase there were fourteen participants including his Bengalee comrades Barin, Nolini, Suresh and Bijoy, Khitish Chandra and Kanai. There were eight occasional visitors of whom were Rajani Kanta Palit, Anil Baran Roy, Naren Das Gupta (father of the present Managing Trustee of Sri Aurobindo Ashram Pondicherry, Shri Manoj Dasgupta) and Sris Goswami.

Twelve years later the crowd thinned. Many had abandoned Sri Aurobindo, mostly due to political reasons. Those who left him either failed to realise or understand his ways of thinking or felt what Sri Aurobindo’s thought was unachievable and a type of utopia. Although there is no direct evidences to prove that most had sulked on Sri Aurobindo’s ways of thinking, it is usually surmised that they felt dissatisfied. Suresh became a follower of Mahatma Gandhi and Bejoy went virtually untraced. On December 1929 Barin went back to Bengal. The reasons are still very hazy. The rumour mills have it that it was
a difference of opinion with the Mother of the Ashram. The position still remains hazy and without a proof or any document. Barin revived ‘Bijoli’ and published it for another two years between 1931 and 1933. Earlier after returning from Andaman jails in 1920, he published ‘Bijoli’ for six years from 1920 to 1926. Most of what he wrote in Bijoli was on Sri Aurobindo’s new type of Integral Yoga. Bijoli was printed and published from Calcutta but most of its articles were written and edited in Pondicherry.

Only Nolini remained with Sri Aurobindo. He was the Secretary of the Ashram. A new set of followers emerged. There was very little of Sri Aurobindo’s thought and philosophical outlook in the later issues of Bijoli.

In the following chapters of this thesis the researcher has shown how Barin rued over his ‘Sejda’ (Sri Aurobindo)’s voluntary withdrawing from politics for reasons that he felt were really ‘unfounded’. Sri Aurobindo never replied to such a position and only held all that Barin said was only a piece of ‘Bengalee emotion’.
Speaking to his accomplices and followers in the evening discussions, Sri Aurobindo dealt at length on the politics of Khilafat movement. He speaks profusely on Kemal Pasha and praised him on his forthright and brave action. For almost two pages he dealt on the issue of why Kemal Pasha was justified in fighting out the political war and how the Turks have a history of fighting back on political matters.

Similarly he provided an almost four page answer to a question raised by a disciple on the difference between the nature of politics in Europe and India. This possibly is one of the longest answer in the series of evening talks that Sri Aurobindo gave to a disciple on June 29, 1926.

At places he was candid in admitting why Indian culture was in ‘abject condition’ almost like the ‘Fort of Ginghee’ with pillars scattered here and there. 79

A close and pointed study of Evening Talks is sufficient to prove how badly Sri Aurobindo felt living outside direct and practical politics and yet possessed the capacity of overcoming such a feeling through by covering it up with mental and psychic explanations.
It is normally accepted that Sri Aurobindo wanted to spiritualize politics. The notion is wild and wrong. He was sensible enough not to think on those lines. Actually he wanted to use Indian spirituality to reach the masses within and outside India. Therefore he deftly replaced all accepted, powerful and pervading concepts of Adi Shankaracharya’s `Mayavad’ (doctrine that tries to establish World as a normal Illusion) with ‘Lilavad’ (doctrine of World as Reality and Play of the Divine and Cosmic Force).

On August 7 1926, he said that Mayavada had ruined Indian politicians. `They take all political cants and catch phrases and they adopt them in their talk, not in work. That is all due to Mayavada (doctrine of illusion) – our men have become too subtle in their minds and all our politicians are drawn from that class.’

He used Mayavad to remain engaged in politics and yet remain out of it. His karma was of politics for humanity and politics of spirituality. It was Bhagavad Gita’s concept of Nishkama Karma. On most occasions he kept repeating that India ‘Politics is spirituality’.
Left alone to think in his own way Sri Aurobindo had become a very lonely man after his brother and fellow comrades left him in Pondicherry by 1926. Motilal and C R Das had already severed connections. The remaining were gradually leaving him unable to grasp and understand his novel and exceptional ways of thinking of humanity, society, politics and spirituality converging on all aspects of individual, society, community and state. Mira Richard (The Mother of Sri Aurobindo Ashram) had finally arrived with her friend to the Ashram in 1920 and was awaiting on the wings to begin her spiritual journey with her Guru and guide Sri Aurobindo for future. The path had become clear.

On August 7, 1926 Sri Aurobindo characterised Indian politicians as imitative of the English adopting political cants and catch phrases only in talk and not in work. He blamed the doctrine of illusion or Maya and the education system and said, ```indian politics had very little practical value'``. It was yet another instance, how Sri Aurobindo liked to get involved in political thinking. It could be that he quit active politics as in India it lacked practical objectivity.
Although initially against, the concept of setting up an Ashram as he felt it would be a `one man affair’, he finally succumbed to the prayer of the Mother and the Ashram was formed in 1926. But Sri Aurobindo had decided on a recluse. It was his real self-exile. He said, it was again for a bigger cause for humanity. He had once again entered the field his chosen field of politics of humanity and spirituality. But now he is all alone. His search on was how to build a new race of human being with a new mind that is above the normal level of mind and submission to gods.

His search for supermind, super consciousness and establishing the Vedic concept of truth consciousness within human being had started. His engagement with regular politics became more thicker as he found more time and took the liberty in using his integral yoga to politics and society. Therefore, although in official recluse, he started getting even more involved with all small things happening in the world, reading newspapers and listening to radio bulletins that was linked to his room by an engineer `Pavitra’(P.B St.Hillaire), a devotee and close accomplice.
On 24th November, 1926, he declared that the overmind had descended. He, however made the claim in 1934, the year when the Constitution of the Ashram was adopted and formulated by him on Mother’s insistence. Although, reluctant, Sri Aurobindo worked out the Constitution, but found far more interest in political affairs sweeping the world at that point of time. His recluse was pure and complete. Its purpose was fulfilled. The world political situation had become congenial for Sri Aurobindo once again to drown himself in politics and start applying his yogic forces while getting engaged in all affairs.

Remarkable are Sri Aurobindo’s three withdrawals. Sri Aurobindo voluntarily withdrew from Bengal in 1910 but remained engaged in politics and society. Sri Aurobindo voluntarily withdrew from normal Pondicherry life in 1926 and went into recluse but remained engaged in world and domestic political affairs. Sri Aurobindo voluntarily withdrew from the material world on December 5, 1950 by refusing to accept modern medicine and accept death by naturality. When asked why he was refusing modern medicine he is believed to have told his doctor Prabhat Sanyal, “you won’t understand”. 82
Between 1920 and 1926, Sri Aurobindo was mostly engaged in making his socio political views known to his disciples mixing it up with politics. In 1920 Mahatma Gandhi had descended on an almost vacant Indian political scene. At that time there was a real leadership vacuum, if not crisis, in the Indian political arena. Sri Aurobindo received full support from all political quarters to lead India’s freedom struggle. But he decided on the contrary. In the later days after India became Independent, Jawaharlal Nehru, wondered, “we were puzzled why he left direct politics and decided to travel alone.”

Sri Aurobindo was a keen observer and kept receiving feedbacks from all his political accomplices. What he failed to appreciate was their wish that he should return to fill in the burgeoning leadership gap. He kept refusing everyone and everybody, thereby unconsciously marginalizing himself from them. He stuck to his own agenda that would help him swim for an equal number of years even in recluse. His only advantage was the changing political scenario. He balanced it between Savitri, his Mantra and world politics.
The fourth phase (1928 – 1950): In recluse

India and the world witnessed hectic political activity between 1928 and 1950. Almost thirty-three major political developments took place in British India between 1928 and 1947. After that there were three great political crisis. They were the Korean Crisis (1950), the Pakistan and Kashmir problem (1950) and India’s border dispute with China on the issue of Tibet (1950). Till today, the second and third issue have remained unresolved. In 1950 Sri Aurobindo had offered his suggestions and comments to resolve the issues. The suggestions were brushed aside by the Government. In the present context the comments have become irrelevant.

Barring three major developments Sri Aurobindo offered his suggestions and observations on all political developments. He remained silent on the Great World Economic Depression of (1928) Bengal Famine (1943) and the Royal Indian Navy (R.I.N) Mutiny or the Naval Revolt of 1946. It is also surprising that Sri Aurobindo did not offer his comments on the passing away (1941) of his friend
Rabindranath Tagore. He, however offered his comments after the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi (1948).

On three occasions he could not hold back his temptation and intervened personally. They were, (i) on the setting up of three Contributory War Funds to help the Allied Forces in Second World War (1940), (ii) sending an emissary to influence the Indian National Congress leaders and suggest them accept the proposals of the Cripps Mission (1942), and (iii) start negotiations with French officers on the merger of Pondicherry with the free Union of India (1947).

On all the three occasions, he failed miserably. His suggestions were rejected. He was publicly criticized as an ‘ignorant person’ and a ‘megalomaniac’ by his own followers and accomplices. Sri Aurobindo had no option but to use the same old shield and put forward unconvincing excuses like ‘nishkama karma’ and make statements like ‘or else the government would have dissolved the Ashram’ The matter has been dealt in detail in the later passages of this thesis.

Although Sri Aurobindo had announced his going into recluse from November 24, 1926, he could not stay away from these incidents and kept offering his comments to most of them during his discussions with his disciples and devotees in the Ashram at the Evening Talks.
He was deeply touched with most of the incidents and was somehow trying to get associated and engaged with the political developments.

In 1929 the words ‘Sri Aurobindo’ appeared on the title page of a local book which has currently gone untraceable. It became established in 1933. Interestingly, in 1920 articles published in some local journals of Chandennagore had addressed him as ‘Sri Aurobindo’. However, that did not leave any impact.

From 1933, India and the world knew him as Sri Aurobindo. There was general feeling among the Indian psyche that Sri Aurobindo might re-emerge in politics. By 1928 the Ashram was formally set up at Pondicherry and Sri Aurobindo went into recluse from Nov 24 1926. There were only a few whom he met after that date. Rabindranath Tagore visited him on May 28 1928. It is still not known what discussions took place between them. The poet came back convinced that Sri Aurobindo would soon come out of self-exile and re-join India’s struggle for freedom. Till 1930 Sri Aurobindo neither returned to British India nor did he rejoin the freedom struggle. Tagore was disappointed as was his brother Barin, who said in an extended article
published in `Bijoli' in April 1933 where he said, `where is Sri Aurobindo now, when the country needs him the most? The others who met him were the French Indologist and Harvard-returned Sylvain Levy and a very influential English woman Olive Maitland-Marsh who stayed in the Ashram. A number of times he refused audience to Gandhi on `impersonal' grounds. The celebrated English novelist Somerset Maugham who was passing through India via China to gather materials for his novel `Razors Edge' also could not meet him and left his visiting card at the Ashram gate.

Other world personalities like Albert Schweitzer, Maria Montessori, Mircea Eliade, Paul Brunton and Rene Guenon sent their books and writings to him and promoted him as one of the most authentic representative of Indian spiritual traditions. Newspapers, journals and magazines echoed him as India's greatest living thinker. Sri Aurobindo's position became similar to that held by Romain Rolland almost twenty years ago.

Though engaged in the quest for a supraphysical, Sri Aurobindo however did not disengage himself from the outer world. He maintained regular contacts through newspapers, radio and any other means of
verbal communication he received through his disciples and devotees.

Sri Aurobindo said that one should not and cannot escape the world but has to remain in it and get transformed through a mystical and inward ascent and descent. Mircea Eliade\textsuperscript{85} calls it a "ritual interiorization"\textsuperscript{86} noticed earlier in many Indian mystics. It is the claimed and imaginary mastery of the cosmic world through physical means. Sri Aurobindo termed it as evolution and involution. According to him, humans will have to undergo a process of triple transformation of the spiritual, psychical and supramental kind to achieve supramental consciousness. The consciousness will divinize the earth and make `life divine'.

In his book `Life Divine', Sri Aurobindo approaches society, politics, culture, literature, science and philosophy both in a material and metaphysical way. In Sri Aurobindo's opinion, the biggest problem is the problem of harmony. At the level of mind, the problem cannot be resolved.

According to Sri Aurobindo, "mind is not an instrument of knowledge, but an object of ignorance".\textsuperscript{87} He points out that all
material problems of the earth can only be resolved and harmony achieved at the level of supermind. In that way, until then he was a new thinker who could imagine some level over the mind terming it in his own ways as ‘overmind and supermind’. He framed overmind as the plane of the gods, where the individual submission and surrender takes place before the ‘supreme’ and supermind as the level where the ‘descent of the supreme mind takes place’ because of this submission.

But his prime aim was to achieve what he wrote in a letter on June 29 1926, ‘‘In India we had nothing of the mental idea of politics...There was not the idea of interest in India as in Europe...The state machinery also was not elastic and plastic.’’ He blamed the English rulers for disfiguring the Indian political system by using the model of central authority and dictatorship.

He said, ‘‘the nation idea India never had. It only had a cultural and spiritual idea’’. That could be the reason he took the pleasure of trying to use spirituality in politicizing matters from Pondicherry in his own way. Although in the later stages he also felt that such attempts of spiritualizing issues are without any outcome
and had opposed it in a few correspondence and queries raised by disciples and followers.

On September 6 1926 he said to a disciple, "All the energy that I have I owe to yoga. I was very incapable before. Even the energy that I put forth in 'politics' came from yoga". 90 Sri Aurobindo’s love for politics never left him. In some form he had to reveal it until the end and whenever possible.

A product of European liberal thought, Sri Aurobindo cautiously treaded the path to prove himself a free thinker and up-holder of democratic values. He issued prohibitory orders to stop prostration in front of the Mother and his photo in Sri Aurobindo Ashram reception room in Pondicherry. By then some have started holding him as Avatar. He never encouraged or claimed such ideas but also did not dissuade them who felt it in their very odd ways.

On the contrary, he wrote `it would have been better if the sadhaks had been a less neurotic company’”. 91
Quite consistently, Sri Aurobindo had always been critical of Mahatma Gandhi and his ways of thinking, though at times he felt that it had some value, but in most occasions, Gandhi’s moves appeared barren to Sri Aurobindo, for him.

On July 31, 1932, Sri Aurobindo wrote in a letter, "what Gandhi calls soul-force is only a strong vital will that had taken a religious turn. Gandhi spoiled it by his own ambition to be a man of reason, while in fact, he has no reason in him at all. Never was he reasonable at any moment in his life, I suppose never will be. ....I don’t think he is himself really sure what he will do next. He has not only two minds but three or four minds and all depends on which will turn up topmost to a particular moment and how it will combine with the others." He placed V.I.Lenin and Mustapha Kemal on a higher pedestal pointing out that it is quite unlikely they would not know their minds and ways of action.

Sri Aurobindo, however, was highly critical of Communism and in December 25, 1938 wrote, "In which way is Communism better than Fascism. Formerly people were unconscious slaves, now under Communism they are conscious slaves...They are bound to state, the dictator and
the party. They can’t even choose the dictator. And whoever differs from them is mercilessly suppressed. The whole thing whatever, its name is a fraud. It is impossible to change humanity by political machinery. It can’t be done.’’, 93

On December 27, 1938, Sri Aurobindo lambasted the entire Indian parliamentary system and held a highly critical view of the prevailing political scene. He claimed, ‘’India is now trying to imitate the West. Parliamentary government is not suited to India. But we always take up what the West has thrown off. My idea of an ideal government is what once Tagore wrote. There may be one of Rashtrapati (President) at the top with considerable powers so as to secure continuity of policy and an assembly of representatives of the nation. The provinces will combine into a federation united at the top, leaving ample scope to local bodies to make laws according to their local problems….The Congress at the present stage is but a fascist organization. Gandhi is the dictator like Stalin. I won’t say like Hitler. What Gandhi says they accept and even the Working Committee follows him. Then it goes to AICC which adopts it and then the Congress. There is no opportunity for any difference of opinion,
except for Socialists who are allowed to differ provided they don’t seriously differ. Whatever resolutions they pass are obligatory on all provinces whether the resolutions suit the provinces or not; there is no room for any other independent opinion. Everything is fixed before and the people are only allowed to talk over it – like Stalin’s Parliament. When we started the nationalist movement we began with the idea of throwing out the Congress oligarchy and open the whole organization to the general mass.’’ 94

Sri Aurobindo’s hate towards the Congress style of politics is clear from the above comment. It leaves without an iota of doubt how deep was his engagement in regular politics although he refrained from getting involved in it by showing his masterly mental strength. Then the natural question that one would raise, why didn’t he come forward in joining active politics and help anti-Congress forces like Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose have their way.

Subhas quit Congress politics in 1939 after the Tripuri Congress betrayed by no other than Gandhi and his followers. He was a victim of politics. It could be Sri Aurobindo was already aware that politics of Independence and nationalists would become murkier by the
day and he was not willing to play the role of a mud cleaner or a sweeper. However, Sri Aurobindo never carried a high opinion about Subhas Chandra Bose’s calibre as a leader. While discussing Bose with a disciple at the Ashram in the Evening Talks on 29 Jan 1939 Sri Aurobindo said, `` whenever he has been in authority, there has been trouble. The Congress split in Bengal came in his time. He is an intellectual without a grasp on realities. He talks of India exerting international influence! You are not even a nation and you talk of being international. You have to be first Independent. Even in a small affair like the China-Japanese War what you have been able to do is send a small ambulance unit. It has always been my impression that Subhas is a good lieutenant but never a great leader’’. He further said, `` Subhas is full of egoism. He stands for principle but always says vote for me’’. It is really surprising to note that a claimed yogi can carry so much of anguish against a person (Subhas Chandra Bose), who had declared him to be his `spiritual guru’ in his unfinished biography `The Indian Pilgrim’ (1939)
From the above comment it is clear that Sri Aurobindo too was not free of rancour and therefore speaks like an ordinary politician. Later, Sri Aurobindo also opposed Subhas’s tying up with Japan to free India from the clutches of British rule.

Sri Aurobindo’s apathy towards practical politics and those who are involved in it is clear from a letter written to his younger brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh in April 1920, `` Why did I leave politics? Because our politics is not the genuine Indian article. It is an European import, just an imitation of European ways. But that too was needed. Both of us got engaged in politics of the European style. Had we not done so, the country would not have risen and we too would not have had the experience of or obtained a full development....But now the time has arrived to take the hold of the substance instead of extending the shadow. We have to awaken the true soul of India and in its image the fashion of all works. For the past ten years, I have been silently pouring ‘my influence’ into this European political vessel and there has been some result.....But if I went out to do that work again by getting associated with the political leaders and working with them, it would be supporting an alien law of being and a false political life. People now want to
spiritualize politics. Gandhi, for instance — but they can’t get hold of the right way. What is Gandhi doing? Making a hodge-podge called Satyagraha out of ‘ahimsa paramo dharma’ (non-violence is the highest religion/ law). He said, it is imported from Russia or ‘Indianized Tolstoyism or Indianized Bolshevism’. To him, both are outdated and a mismatch to Indian conditions and therefore should be rejected. 95

Sri Aurobindo’s engagement with politics during his Pondicherry days is further revealed when he calls Gandhi’s model of ‘Charkha (Spinning wheel) thinking as a piece of religious faith and article. In a letter written to a disciple on 27 December 1938 he said, ‘I really do not know, how many of his followers accept or believe in his Gospel of Charka’ (Letter of Dec. 27 1938). According to Sri Aurobindo, ‘Charkha or spinning wheel politics is a tremendous waste of energy just for the sake of a few annas is most unreasonable’. To him, what India needs was ‘education, technical training and fundamental organic principles of organization not on political but on business lines. Sri Aurobindo said, ‘Gandhi is going back to the old system of civilization and does not want
industrial organization. His spin, spin and spin formula is nothing but a meaningless and irrational 'fetish'. 96

Commenting on different models advocated across the world and India, Sri Aurobindo, said on January 6, 1939, "Are not all governments robbers. Some do the robbing with legislation, some without', 97.

As he always felt that India can understand and appreciate politics only through the highest models of spirituality and not power at the lowest level clinging to positions of esteem as is found within the English and Europeans, he said, "What is India going to do with her Independence? Bolshevism? goonda-raj? Things look ominous', 97-A

His apprehensions have somewhat come true.

In a letter of January 29, 1939, he said, "You know what C R Das said about criminals, "He said in my whole career I have not met worse types of criminals than in politics'" and then went on to add, "it is better not to destroy the capitalist class as the Socialists want to. They are the source of national wealth. They should be
encouraged to spend for the nation. Taxing is all right, but you must increase production, start new industries and also raise the standard of living, without it if you increase taxes there will be a state of depression''. 98

His engagement in political and administrative affairs for the welfare of human beings is further substantiated through his stand on the Panchayat system. On February 2 1939 Sri Aurobindo deals with the existing Panchayat system and points out, ``In India the parliamentary system is doomed. It has brought Europe to its present sorry pass. In India one should begin with the old Panchayat system in the villages and then work up the top. The Panchayat system and the guilds have living contact with the people. They are part of the people’s ideas. On the contrary, the Parliamentary system, with local bodies, municipal councils is not workable as they do not have contacts with the people. The councillors make only platform speeches like those representing the Parliament. They only make their `own pile’’ during their period of power. 99
Sri Aurobindo’s distrust towards conventional and regular politics along with politicians is aptly revealed from such quotes.

Unfortunately, sixty-six years later, India is in the grip of `corruption in high offices’ and Sri Aurobindo’s prophecies have come true like daylight. He was a master political scientist, only that he did not flock with those who joined regular politics to extract political fame and mileage after the ’Transfer of Power’ took place on August 15, 1947.

Since his revolutionary days Sri Aurobindo was always concerned on how to bring about a Hindu–Muslim unity. He felt that was one of the best ways of achieving the Indian dream of global consciousness and spirituality. He wanted to stop the politics of Hindu–Muslim then practiced by many politicians in the garb of fake secularism. He was against such practices.

In an undated letter of 1934, he wrote, `as for the Hindu–Muslim affair, I saw no reason why the greatness of India’s past or her spirituality should be thrown in the waste paper basket in order to conciliate the Moslems who would not at all be conciliated by such policy. What has created the Hindu-Moslem split was not Swadeshi, but the acceptance of the communal principle of the Congress ( here Tilak...
made his great blunder) and the further attempt by the Khilafat movement to conciliate them and bring them in on wrong lines....the recognition of that principle in Lucknow Pact made them a permanent and separate political entity in India which ought to never have happened. The Khilafat movement converted the separate political entity into a separate political power”.

With the passage of time, Sri Aurobindo could have become more restless with politics. Spirituality was already playing second string in his ‘cosmic guitar’. On October 2 1934, he blurted out in an aggrieved fashion and said, ‘I do not care a button about having my name in any blessed place. I was never ardent about fame even in my political days; I preferred to remain behind curtain, push people without their knowing it and get things done. It confounded the British government that spoiled my game by prosecuting me and forcing me to be publicly known and a ‘leader’. Then again I don’t believe in books etc, and in propaganda except for politics and patent medicines.... I am perfectly rational. I assure you in my methods and I do not proceed on any personal dislike or fame’.
Finally, on February 10 1935 Sri Aurobindo said what he really wanted on this earth and how he sought to use politics for that. He said, `it is not for personal greatness that I seek to bring down the Supermind. It is to establish a principle of harmony, peace and truth with some inner light on earth...it is earth evolution'. 101 – A

Scholars like Kenneth L Deutsch, V P Verma and V R Mehta have termed Sri Aurobindo’s thoughts as `evolutionary spiritualism’ and called him `avataric evolutionist’. Understanding his ways of politics can only be read through the prism of these two concepts.

On August 18, 1935 he said, `even the Upanishads and the Gita were not final, though everything there may be in seed....I may say it is far from my purpose to propagate a religion, new or old for humanity in the future’, 102

During the fourth phase Sri Aurobindo elaborately worked on global political issues. From his letters and writings it is somewhat clear that he could feel the advancing Second World War and had already started giving out notices.
Sometime in 1935, he wrote, "England has grown rich on India's plundered wealth. France depends on African colonies and Japan needs an outlet for her overburdened population and safe economic markets. China who now complains was itself an imperialist and colonising country for centuries."

Sri Aurobindo well understood the changing global political scenario and therefore decided not to take himself off from it. Politics as is suggested was always his first love and the time had arrived when he can really participate in it from a distance. His hate towards Congress party and its functioning was similar to that about religion. In his opinion religious fanaticism is something that is psychologically low-born and ignorant.

On September 19 1936 he wrote, "I do not take the same view of Hindu religion as Jawaharlal Nehru. Religion is always imperfect because it is a mixture of man's spirituality with his endeavours that come in trying to sublimate ignorantly his lower nature. To me Hindu religion appears as a cathedral-temple, half in ruins, noble in the mass, often fantastic in details but always
fantastic with a significance – crumbling or badly outworn in places, but a cathedral temple where services are given to the unseen and its real presence can be felt who enter with the right spirit.”

Sri Aurobindo felt that Mahatma Gandhi’s ideas appeared to be more Christian and less Hindu as he was willing to serve humanity overcoming every caste barriers, which meant that he was serving the divine. He, however stood apart from Mahatma’s silent efforts of mixing his odd ways of Satyagraha with politics with a religious and spiritual flavour. Sri Aurobindo found it to be inappropriate for Indian conditions. On November 17, 1938 he wrote, “Mahatma is having bad qualms about Congress corruption already. What will it be when purna Satyagraha reigns all over India?”

On the night of November 23 – 24, 1938, Sri Aurobindo fell down and broke his femur bone. His movements became restricted and a very small group surrounded him with whom he discussed mostly issues ranging from the Indian political scene, the rising threat of Nazism and Second World War that he followed very closely. These were the last twelve years of his life. His object of love – politics and
political developments - were pronounced during this period. He hardly discussed spirituality.

However, he concentrated on completing *Savitri*, the mantra and an epic poem as is popularly conceived of. By then he had already started realizing the immobility of spirituality after a point and the necessity of political and social dynamics. That was the reason he submerged himself in discussing political matters, although it wasn’t required for him to think over it.

During this phase of his life Sri Aurobindo also concentrated on developing new editions for *Life Divine* and concluding *Savitri*. The accident confined him to bed for almost four months.

On 1st September 1939, Hitler attacked Poland. On 3rd September 1939, France and Britain declared war against Germany. By May 1940 German armies had controlled Poland and Denmark. The British army was trapped at Dunkirk. Sri Aurobindo was first to react. He claimed of putting his yogic force behind the allies to defeat the evil forces of Hitler. It was imaginary. It was another way that Sri Aurobindo was trying to get engaged in his politics of war and spirituality against the bad and evil. He called Hitler’s forces as ‘dark’ and ‘evil’ and
supported Britain, the same country against whom Sri Aurobindo had fought and spoken so much for the past half century and even conceived of driving them out of India by violent means. Sri Aurobindo, though popularly conceived as a yogi and a sage with visions somewhat superhuman, was in actual reality a balancer, a rationalist and wonderful strategist of survival.

On political issues Sri Aurobindo had always survived when he felt that it was necessary. This was one occasion after his departure from Bengal and British India that he felt that the allied forces will have to be supported for a greater cause and purpose. This was his in-depth reading of politics and social issues, which his followers and devotees tend to paint as something supernatural and avataric, thereby lowering his potentials as a politically sagacious person.

On December 25, 1938 he said, ``I have no faith in government controls, because I believe in a certain amount of freedom - freedom to find out things for oneself in one’s own way, even if it is freedom to commit blunders". He was against European mechanized thinking and said, ``totalitarian and non-totalitarian states do not believe in individual variation and individuals are obliged to follow them. They do it for the sake of efficiency - but whose efficiency? It
is the efficiency of the state as an organized machine, not that of an individual. The individual has no freedom. He doesn’t grow. Organize and there should be scope for plasticity and freedom” 106

The Ashram threw its support in favour of Britain and France. Sri Aurobindo and the Mother of the Ashram donated to the National Defense Fund in May 1940, Viceroy’s War Fund in June 1940 and Madras War Fund in September 1940. Sri Aurobindo had once again got involved in politics.

This drew immense criticism. The students of Scottish Church College, Calcutta held his position as one of ‘utter ignorance about world affairs’. Even his disciple and Congress leader K M Munshi was annoyed that Sri Aurobindo had chosen to speak at this moment. 106 – A

In another instance, in early May 1940, remnants of the French Army and the British Expeditionary Force got stuck at Dunkirk. During this time the German army controlled Poland, Denmark and low countries and broke through the French line at Sedan. Sri Aurobindo claimed that he used his yogic force to free the British and French contingents. 107
Many condemned his action of setting up War Contributory Funds for the Allied Force. The Ashram had followers who supported German intervention to free India. Sri Aurobindo mildly held his position on the ground that "or else the government could have dissolved the Ashram". At that time he also issued a clarification pointing out, "there cannot be the slightest doubt that if one side wins...there would be reign of falsehood and darkness, a cruel oppression and degradation for most of the human race such as people of this country cannot dream of and cannot yet at all realise".

This possibly was Sri Aurobindo's first public intervention in the political field since he withdrew in 1910. The other interventions were somewhat involuntary and mainly worked as a piece of pleasure object and associated responsibility for humanity and goodness of the world. In 1943, Sri Aurobindo said to a disciple, "I can tell you that I had put my force there (in Russia) daily and concretely enough in all conscience".
On this occasion Sri Aurobindo wrote to the Governor of Madras on September 19 1940, "the world domination of Nazi Germany had to be avoided... as it is a question threatening the whole future of humanity. To this cause our support and sympathy will be unswerving whatever may happen. We look forward to the victory of Britain... for a more secure world order', 109

To get associated with the outer world Sri Aurobindo even claimed that his yogic force had played a role in the Second World War. He claimed that this yogic force helped in pulling out the Allied forces from a natural calamity that had suddenly cropped up when untimely fogs stood as a hindrance to their onward movement at Dunkirk. At that point it seemed that the British had lost the Second World War.

After all this some held him to be a wonderful rishi (sage) and some rubbished him as a 'megalomaniac'. 110 Whatever the position, Sri Aurobindo always wanted to get attached to world events. It has been often proved that even in recluse, he remained a political man
and not a spiritual person as is commonly held.

Critics have often repeated the same question that how could Sri Aurobindo help the same force against which he was accused of waging war and once sharpened his best weapons. The answer could be simple. In Pondicherry, Sri Aurobindo had abandoned the idea of aggressive nationalism and had evolved into an internationalist. He had been constantly repeating that India’s Independence was ‘fait accompli’ and there was no need for him to come out and lead the movement along with other nationalist leaders.

From letters, discourses and statements issued by Sri Aurobindo it appears that he abhorred conventional politics and did not want to get associated.

In 1943 the British Royal Society endorsed his nomination for Nobel Prize in Literature. Sir Francis Younghusband took the initiative. In 1950 a similar attempt was made to award him with the Nobel Peace Prize. By then, Sri Aurobindo had passed away. Nobel winners Pearl Buck and Gabriele Mistral had recommended on his
nomination. The prize could not be offered posthumously. The Mother also refused accepting any earthly prize on his behalf.

Sri Aurobindo lived in politics. It never left him. Cripps Mission arrived in India in 1942. On March 30 Sir Stafford Cripps announced his proposal of self-governing dominion status for India after the war as a first step towards India’s independence.

Sri Aurobindo immediately supported the proposal and sent his emissary Duraiswamy Iyer to the members of the Congress Working Committee to accept the proposal. Before that he telegraphed his support to the proposal to Congress leader C Rajagopalachari and Dr B S Moonje, the Hindu Mahasabha leader.

Sri Aurobindo’s views were rejected by the Congress. The general opinion was, Sri Aurobindo had quit active politics and the country only looks up to the Congress leaders and not to Sri Aurobindo for its liberation. His opinions mattered little with the Congress leaders. Mahatma Gandhi said, that if he is not interested in pushing through his proposals, ``why doesn’t he come out and join active politics. He would be ideally suited to join Indian politics at that point of time and work from Bengal’’. Gandhi said, ``he has quit politics. Then why does he interfere’’.
Jawaharlal Nehru and Dr C Rajagopalachari had accepted Sri Aurobindo's stand and the Cripps offer but Gandhi found it unacceptable because of his opposition to war. Maulana Azad, once considered a follower of Sri Aurobindo also opposed it and the Congress finally turned it down. Azad had met Sri Aurobindo sometime during his revolutionary phase and was highly impressed in accepting him as his leader.

But after his departure to Pondicherry, there were many, like Azad who were not happy about his staying away from practical politics. Many Congress leaders, like K M Munshi felt that Sri Aurobindo was right and his stand could have saved India from its worst civil war. He also gave an open statement supporting Sri Aurobindo. In 1951, he wrote, "today we realise if the first (Cripps) proposal had been accepted there would have been no partition, no refugees and no Kashmir problem." 

The blood
bath of 1947 could have been avoided along with three Indo - Pakistan wars and the problem of Kashmir and border intrusions.

Sri Aurobindo also took interest in the internal factional politics of the Congress party and national political matters. Among all Congress leaders he showed special preference towards Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel (1875 – 1950), India’s first home minister. He held an opinion about Sardar Patel that was different from other Congress leaders. He didn’t provide any explanation to his holding such a position in favour of Patel.

On December 22 1946, he said, ``Out of all, Patel is the only strong man’’. Patel had shown great strength in negotiating the integration of the princely states, Kashmir’s accession to India and the merger of the Hyderabad state. 113

Sri Aurobindo was also disturbed with Japan’s advancement in the Second World War. With Japan’s surrender on 15th August 1945, he heaved a sigh of relief as that was the end of the fascist regime. It was his own birthday and peace meditations took place at the Ashram. The population of the Ashram rose substantially as people flooded from Calcutta during the Second World War.
To rehabilitate the influx of newcomers the Mother even opened a school with Sri Aurobindo’s consent. Cripps Mission failed. So did Sri Aurobindo’s views. In 1945 Viceroy Wavell gave a new plan which Sri Aurobindo thought was even better than Cripps. He threw all his weight behind the plan as he found in it genuine signs of liberation.

After that the new Labour Party government in Britain sent a Parliamentary delegation. It was followed up with a Cabinet Mission in 1946 that offered a new plan for a free Indian Union. Like the two previous proposals from Cripps and Wavell, Sri Aurobindo endorsed the Cabinet Mission plan. He said, ‘‘it was an imminent sign of liberating India’’. But when the group system in the plan started unfolding Sri Aurobindo expressed ‘‘serious misgivings’’ because it virtually guaranteed that Bengal, Assam and Punjab would end up in Pakistan. It was virtually a plan to partition India.

Accepting the Cabinet Mission plan would mean partition of the country was inevitable. He was opposed to it and instructed Surendra Mohan Ghosh, his follower and leader of Bengal Provincial Congress Committee (BPCC) not to accept the partition resolution.
The only condition for accepting the resolution could be giving the districts the liberty to remain in India.  

Sri Aurobindo seems not to have forgotten his past violent methods of revolution and outlook. In retaliation to the direct action day announced by M A Jinnah of Muslim League Sri Aurobindo said `Why should the Hindus also not strike’? It is really surprising that a yogi who claims to have attained so much of calm and equanimity becomes restless and violent. 

Each time it could be Sri Aurobindo’s unconscious mind that drives him into politics in different forms, however he may try to distance himself holding politics no longer being in his domain. The issue of Hindu - Muslim unity continued to disturb him. 

On October 19 1946, he wrote ``As regards Bengal, things are certainly very bad.......I foresaw it when I was in Bengal and warned the people that it was probable and almost inevitable and that they should be prepared for it. What is happening has not come as a surprise for me’. M.A. Jinnah had called for a ‘direct action day’ for the Muslims against the Hindus. There were widespread riots in
Bengal, Tripura, Noakhali and in Calcutta, where the horrible `Great Calcutta Killings'' took place. 116

On August 15, 1947, when the much awaited `transfer of power' took place a visibly pained Sri Aurobindo wrote, `India is free but she has not achieved unity, only a fissured and broken freedom...the old communal division of Hindus and Muslims seems to have hardened into the figure of a permanent political division of the country'' . 117 Till the last, he hoped `that Congress and the nation will not accept the settled fact as for ever settled or as anything more than a temporary expedient. It will seriously weaken and cripple India forever opening to civil strife, foreign invasions and conquests.....By whatever means this division between Hindus and Muslims will have to go. Without it India’s destiny will be frustrated and ruined. That must not be allowed to happen''. 118

Sri Aurobindo’s devotees however claimed August 15 to be a day with divine providence. It was Sri Aurobindo’s birthday. Even today, many devotees would keep their eyes closed propagating in a
somewhat 'eccentric' fashion that Sri Aurobindo had brought about the transfer of power through his yoga. Many of his disciples are of the opinion 'Sri Aurobindo is the prime architect of India's freedom and he achieved it through his yoga'.

It seems that the whole issue had been fuelled by Sri Aurobindo himself as he ``felt gratifying that he happened to be born on August 15 and it was not fortuitious. To him it was the seal of divine.''

The devotees felt that India's Independence was Sri Aurobindo's seal.

Sri Aurobindo's written speech of 'Five Dreams' was read out on the Tuticorin Radio Station on August 14 1947, on the eve of Independence.

Until now, it is considered one of the the best pieces of political literature available to understand Sri Aurobindo's view on politics during his Pondicherry days. He mixed up politics, with spirituality, consciousness, unity, harmony and, of course, transformation of the species being. It was one of the best documents available to start a 'human potential movement' conceived by Sri
Aurobindo. His dreams came through when Professor Haridas Chaudhuri set up one such institute at California in 1954.

Even after Independence, Sri Aurobindo’s political discussions continued till 1949 with Surendra Mohan Ghosh. The discussions proved Sri Aurobindo’s active interest in politics. During this period Sri Aurobindo spoke profusely on Kashmir problem, Korean War and China’s aggressive stand against India led by Mao Ze Dong. A number of leaders like Jayprakash Narayan felt that Sri Aurobindo would return soon to India’s political life. Sri Aurobindo also received covert and clandestine offers to become India’s first President as a ‘Rishi’ leader. Many wanted that India’s first President should be a ‘Rajarshi’ (sage king).

Sri Aurobindo laughed at it away as a meaningless joke as he was away from public life and regular and practical political life for a long period. Newly-created Pakistan invaded Kashmir in October 1947. The Indian army resisted and pushed back the infiltrators and marauders.

Prime Minister Nehru as advised by Governor-General Lord Mountbattten approached the U.N.O. to resolve the dispute. Kashmir is
still a disputed territory and Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK) continues to be a terrorist a hub with terrorist camps. The Pakistan leaders have already called for a second partition of India.

In 1947, Sri Aurobindo wrote, ``the concept of two nationalities is a newly-fangled notion invented by Jinnah, who was himself a descendant of a Hindu, converted in fairly recent times, named Jinahbhai and many of the most Mohameddan leaders had similar origin'’. He said `` 90 percent of Indian Mussalmans are descendants of converted Hindus and belonged as much to the Indian nation as the Hindus themselves’’. 120

It is very strange that a person, who had voluntarily quit politics and has engaged in worldly yoga, could not free himself from his past. The key to his engagement with the past and through future was politics.

In an undated letter of 1947, Sri Aurobindo, while highlighting the country’s plight, partition and racial conflicts, said, `` history very seldom records things that were decisive, but took place behind the veil; its records show in front of the
curtain....my action in giving the Bengal movement its militant turn or founding the revolutionary movement is very little known’. 121

Sri Aurobindo’s drive for a political recognition might not have left him even after three decades of active departure from the direct political activities. On September 27 1947, he directly intervened in political issues. It was 18 years later since he went into total recluse from 1929. Britain had transferred power to India on August 15 1947. Sri Aurobindo wanted to make Pondicherry a meeting place between France and India. *Mother India* magazine wrote, ‘‘Sri Aurobindo supports merger of French India’. He was searching for Pondicherry’s distinctiveness within the Indian union and therefore held a meeting with Maurice Schumann, head of French Cultural delegation and Francois Baron, the Governor of French India. This was his third direct political interference after 1910, the other two being in respect of Cripps Mission of 1942, and accepting of the Wavell Plan of 1945 and Cabinet Mission of 1946. 122

Some felt that Sri Aurobindo’s political stand was that of a pacifist and that he was principally opposed to all forms of violence
and denounced terrorism and insurrection. Some suggested him to be the forerunner of the gospel of Ahimsa. The positions are wholly incorrect and misguided. Sri Aurobindo was neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist. He took up peace as part of highest ideal and not as part of any creed called non-violence. In his perception peace is both spiritual and psychological. Without changing the human nature it cannot come with any finality. Sri Aurobindo’s stress on unification and harmony is overtly political on the material plane and has to be achieved spiritually through a transformed psychology.

Sri Aurobindo’s spiritualism is vastly different from the conventional spiritual model and is termed as ‘psychological spiritualism’ and not the ‘occult spiritualism’ as it happens normally. In this way Sri Aurobindo was an exception to all other previous thinkers. He adopted a very unique model, however utopian it might look, to put across the point of humanity and harmony across the world.

In a message to Andhra University in December 1948, Sri Aurobindo floated the political concept of a ‘Federation’. He said, ‘

The idea of federation and a complete machinery for its perfect working have been discovered and will be at full work. Above all the
spirit of patriotic unity has to be firmly established with the people....The Congress itself in the days before liberation came had pledged itself to the formation of linguistic provinces...India’s national life should be based on her natural strengths and the principle of unity in diversity which has been normal to her and its fulfilment should be the fundamental course.’’

He announced that ‘`a Union of States and regional peoples would again be formed for a united India based on Swabhava and Swadharma’’. In 1948, Sri Aurobindo had suggested, the formation of states on linguistic lines. In 1956, the Congress leadership under Nehru’s guidance passed the State Reorganization Act and Andhra was formed out of it.

But going by what Sri Aurobindo had said and what had happened since 1956 are hugely different. Sri Aurobindo’s suggestions dividing states on linguistic basis was accompanied by such a `high degree of centralization and bureaucratization that the `natural play of life’’ of the newly formed provinces was stifled rather than
encouraged. The rigid and parliamentary representation imposed on the states, under the Constitution of 1950 admittedly has served mainly to generate corruption and foster divisions. The new polity is hardly capable of providing the `perfect working’ Sri Aurobindo had in mind for an Indian Federation.

In October 1950, China invaded Tibet. Sri Aurobindo could not take his eyes off from such a tyranny. Appeal by Tibet to the United Nations fell on deaf ears and India under Nehru’s leadership remained silent. In October 1962, China breached Indian borders. As per the Henderson-Brooks report recently released by novelist Neville Maxwell, India was the aggressor and Nehru had taken a wrong forward position along Arunachal Pradesh, although it was neither militarily or administratively equipped to combat China. Hundreds of Indian soldiers died due to Nehru’s faulty policy.

Sri Aurobindo did not live to see India–China war of 1962. However he was aware in 1950 that China was coming up as a potential threat for India. Forgetting all about his announced positions of spirituality and human progress and unity he observed in April 1950:

`` In Asia a more perilous situation has arisen in the emergence of Communism and standing sharply against all forms of continental unity
of the people in this part of the world....It would engulf the whole of Northern Asia through the combination of two enormous Communist powers – Russia and China and would overshadow with a threat of absorption of South - Western Asia and Tibet. It might be pushed to overrun all up to the frontier of India, menacing her security and that of Western Asia with the possibility of an invasion and an overrunning and subjection by penetration or even by overwhelming military force to an unwanted ideology, political and social institutions and dominance of militant mass of Communism''.

On April 4, 1950 when a disciple,( name purposely not disclosed by Sri Aurobindo) wanted to visit Delhi and criticize Nehru for his wrong ways of thinking, Sri Aurobindo said, ``Pakistan imbroglio is unlikely to get resolved soon. Nehru’s efforts to prevent the inevitable clash are not likely to succeed for more than a short time so it is not necessary to give him the slap you wanted.''

On June 28, 1950 he discussed Korean war and said that the affairs in Korea and its surroundings are like a `pike – staff'. In his opinion the ways of Communist domination in South East Asia had
begun and Korea and China are examples. North Korea attacked South Korea with Soviet support, while China invaded Tibet four months later in October 1950.

Here it is relevant to quote one of Sri Aurobindo’s very inner communication to the Mother of the Ashram. It is really very interesting, the communication concerns politics and world society combined with the need of how to save humanity and make it prosper to the highest extent.

Disclosed sometime on June 6, 1967, the inner communication read, `All the countries live in falsehood. If only one country stood courageously for truth, the world might be saved’.

For forty years Sri Aurobindo had laboured to free the earth from the clutches of a dying age. India always held a special place in his consciousness, politically, socially, economically and of course spiritually. He combined all. Until today, his experiments continue at Pondicherry and other places.
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