Historian Leonard Gordon claims in his book "Bengal: The Nationalist Movement (1876–1940)" Sri Aurobindo’s flight might be adjudged an act of cowardice. Under the pressure of possible police action against him he left political involvement and fled. But, if we grant that he may well have felt that he heard a call inside himself that he identified as divine and if we place his action in an Indian context, then it may be viewed as a culturally legitimate solution to a personal dilemma. It has been common in India for men in many walks of life to experience a sudden leap of faith and to retire to a meditative life. At any rate, Sri Aurobindo’s political phase had ended. He resisted all entreaties to return and again take up a position of political leadership’. ¹

Sri Aurobindo was also not consistent in his behaviour towards Congress leaders. For twenty years he kept refusing requests to meet
Mahatma Gandhi. Finally in 1939, his close associated and a revolutionary from Bengal Surendra Mohan Ghosh persuaded him to meet Gandhi. Sri Aurobindo is believed to have said, "He can come now. Whatever the political difference, there was is no more. He can see me. You may convey this to him". However, the meeting did not take place as Ghosh was arrested for offering 'individual satyagraha'.

It is commonly thought that Sri Aurobindo had quit politics for ever. As a historian Gordon couldn't have gone further as he had documents before him to prove his points. But Sri Aurobindo's perspective of politics was completely different. He saw politics as a tool for harmonizing humanity. To Sri Aurobindo, politics was never an instrument for capturing state power or building state institutions. It was a mental concept.

It seemed Sri Aurobindo was highly influenced by the Greek philosopher Aristotle's concept of 'Politics'. He said, "Aristotle's book on Politics is too much of a mental concept".
Moreover, Sri Aurobindo never considered history to be perfect as he felt "the inner forces that change history are never located. We only accumulate a turbulence of events which carry no meaning." 5

In fact, Sri Aurobindo’s politics had begun in Pondicherry and not ended as Gordon thinks. The politics he liked to lead from the behind was finally with him. He never held any leadership position in any political party. He was a literary revolutionary. His politics was in mind.

Gordon couldn’t have gauged how much Sri Aurobindo loved politics and, like most other historians, he had only seen him through the lens of available documents.

The facts and arguments used in the present research work prove how Sri Aurobindo was engaged in political matters. In his own words, "I liked to remain in it." 6 He blamed the British for not allowing him to do so. They prosecuted him and projected him to be in the cacophony of politics. Now that he had come away and was safe in Pondicherry he took immense pleasure in dealing in politics for most
of his remaining forty years, of course, in a non-conventional mental plane.

There exists a number of commentaries and biographies on Sri Aurobindo. Some admire him, others criticize. As Peter Heehs claims, "he is both reviled and praised for things which he had never thought or done". Unfortunately in most cases people have either misinterpreted him or misrepresented him. Tagore said, "I do not know about his politics or political faith. All I know is that he is a very wise man, one of the wisest we have and therefore is liable to be misunderstood even by his own friends". It really happened in Sri Aurobindo’s life.

Broadly, in contemporary society there exist three types of Sri Aurobindo. The first type of Sri Aurobindo is only for the Aurobindonian group. This group are of a distinguished category. They are puritan but would never make their views public. They form an inner society, high-nosed, elite and snooty by nature. This group would never allow any pedestrian thinker to get an entry to interact
with them. They are prone to see all world and other worldly problems through an imaginary `Sri Aurobindo lens'. The second group of Sri Aurobindo followers are of the eccentric variety. They are militant and are not ready to settle anywhere less than viewing Sri Aurobindo as a god incarnate an `avataar' of a supreme being who had descended from the heavens. The third and the biggest group consist of persons to whom Sri Aurobindo has mostly been heard and not carefully or comprehensively read. They start from the premise that Sri Aurobindo was a great seer, visionary, revolutionary, poet and philosopher and therefore the necessity of reading his articles and books do not carry any meaning. To them Sri Aurobindo was someone who was `beyond man' and therefore it is not necessary to analyze or know a person who had been accepted nationwide and world wide as a person who had crossed the known limits of a normal human being. According to them, Sri Aurobindo was a `suprahuman with a supermind'. They dub him as an `Ishwarakoti'9 person and therefore it is only futile trying to conceive him with a normal mind or from a normal outlook.
In Sri Ramakrishna Kathamrita, Mahendranath Gupta speaks of three types of historical recordings. The first is direct and recorded, the second indirect and unrecorded and the third indirect and heard. There are almost two dozen biographies of Sri Aurobindo. A majority of them are indirect and only heard.

The present thesis tries to conclude that Sri Aurobindo was a man of talent but like all humans he too was not without shortcomings. Earlier also many attempts had been made to focus on Sri Aurobindo’s politics. But most scholars have landed calling him a prophet. This thesis does not want to stunt or restrict Sri Aurobindo’s vision on society, politics, human mind and human relations just by calling him a prophet. Sri Aurobindo essentially evolved each day. He changed his thoughts every day.

Recently scientists have proved that the three pound human brain has a capacity to hold seventy thousand thoughts every day. Therefore it couldn’t be that Sri Aurobindo’s capacity of thinking, however tall his thoughts might be was beyond it. What Sri Aurobindo thought was important. Sri Aurobindo himself said that his
thoughts were very subjective and esoteric in nature. In this thesis the logical conclusion would be that Sri Aurobindo loved to live in the politics of humanity, fraternity and social relations. He was not ready to sacrifice his object of love and plaything viz. `Indian spirituality'.

Sri Aurobindo made interesting observations while dealing on practical politics. In July 1926, he wrote `generally women are more efficient than men on the physical plane because they follow intuitions, while man wanders forth into ideas and mental constructions. This can be seen in politics. Women would succeed better'. He found men more intellectual but women far more intuitive.

Sri Aurobindo dealt all earthly problems from the social, political and economic perspectives and tried to provide a mental or spiritual solution to it. He wanted to utilize spirituality to place practical politics with a larger vision. Therefore his politics was that of `spirituality' and `politics in mind'.

However, he never approved of playing the role of a guru, avataar or a `yogi' of the conventional type, though he started
believing that sometimes democratic principles, outlook and attitude could be opposed to the pursuing of yogic principles.

Sri Aurobindo knew that he would be criticized for abandoning the freedom struggle and escaping to Pondicherry, especially at a moment when he was accepted as the national leader. Sri Aurobindo justified his action in his different articles. Though scholars and commentators have criticized Sri Aurobindo for abandoning politics and escaping from British India, there are no proven records to show that his fellow revolutionaries have also criticized him, barring a few like Hem Chandra Kanungo and Charu Chandra Dutta. Both sulked against Sri Aurobindo’s departure in their early days, but later understood their mistakes. 

On the contrary, most of his revolutionary friends and comrades settled with him in Pondicherry. Previous commentaries and researches have tried to show that Sri Aurobindo was a spiritualist and had abandoned politics. To them, Sri Aurobindo had become a social and political soothsayer in Pondicherry. This thesis finds Sri Aurobindo as a man who had loved politics and society and had
therefore developed intellectual skills of analyzing and understanding matters of the future. A void had been created in Sri Aurobindo’s mind because he had to leave politics and British India under certain pressing circumstances. Sri Aurobindo, however, said, that "I did not leave politics under frustrating circumstances". 14

It is not known what he exactly meant by 'frustrating circumstances'. He did not provide any explanation. Anybody can guess what he tried to mean after reading his writing and correspondence in Pondicherry and post-Bengal days between 1910-1950. It is, however, a fact that he did not leave practical politics with any frustration. If that was true then he would never have got engaged in political affairs during his Pondicherry days.

There is really no way to know whether Sri Aurobindo would have left British India if the colonial rulers would not have planned to deport him. On this matter, there are no proven records. Neither does Sri Aurobindo discuss about it. But certainly he did not want to escape. Therefore he decided and took the liberty of not to return. Sri Aurobindo’s idea was if a person is forced to escape then he should also have the right of not to return to his place of escape.
Nobody can force or plead him to come back.

Pondicherry filled the void he was experiencing for nine months after he came out of Alipur Jail in May 1909. A close study of the articles he wrote in the monthly journal `Karmayogin' and `Dharma' is sufficient to prove that he was getting ready to quit politics and concentrate on Yoga. Sri Aurobindo felt it is through yoga that he would be able to relate and connect to politics which was his first love in a larger way. Sri Aurobindo did that in Pondicherry.

Most people with mundane outlook are not able to conceive or understand that Sri Aurobindo’s politics was actually `politics in mind'. It was almost like the `legs of the tortoise' which cannot be seen while the tortoise moves.

Presenting Sri Aurobindo’s role as an allegory it can be said that in the initial stages of his Pondicherry days Sri Aurobindo played a role that was similar to `Arjuna' in the Mahabharata. But finally he rose to the level of Lord Krishna through the Krishna consciousness or overmind, to beat the known physical levels of id, ego and superego and find the secret divinity in man. There was no scope for politics leaving him or his leaving politics.
It would be better to conclude the theses with the words of Sri Aurobindo's very dear brother Barindra Kumar Ghosh who laments on his elder brother's quitting of practical politics.

In the 1931 issue no. 15 of 'Bijoli' Barindra Kumar Ghosh writes an emotional piece titled ''My Explanation'' wherein he observes, ''where is the Sri Aurobindo who sacrificed everything for the country, is he dead or alive or is he both, where is that Sri Aurobindo who left Bengal on a moonlit night twenty-one years ago. He is lost. He is to be found nowhere. He is not found in politics, society, floods and anywhere in the country. Everybody says he is deep into meditation and penance. I really do not know, how Aurobindo's 'tapasya' (penance) will help in the well-being of the country. I really do not know how long he would keep silent and not open up. He is not a hedonist, he is not a slave, he cares for no wealth from the king, he is not in foreign lands, he is not sick, neither is he ill. He is not impotent and inactive. But he is nowhere to be found among Indians, why? He has not shifted from his style of work. He has not left politics and had entered a world of trade and commerce. He has not left India under any force or compulsion. Sri Aurobindo's
exit is neither weak nor dowsing of the flame that was crossing the country twenty-one years ago. He is still the soul of the nation. He is the only voice-soul engaged in the wellbeing of India and its people’. Barin had left Pondicherry Ashram in a huff in December 1929 and never returned forever to his `Sejda’.

In 1939 Barindra wrote a huge piece `Sri Aurobindo as I understand Him’. The almost 200 page typed copy is still a confidential and a `not go out (NGO)’ document for the Pondicherry Ashram. The present researcher was refused permission to see the document.

The then Secretary of the Ashram Nolini Kanta Gupta had read out the piece to Sri Aurobindo. It is reliably learnt that Barin’s wife had sent both the typed original and the carbon copy of the document to the Ashram as she was informed that Sri Aurobindo wanted to see it. In fact, Sri Aurobindo had no interest. It was Nolini’s curiosity and he wanted to see it.

Sri Aurobindo is believed to have said, `it is a piece of Bengali emotion and can be easily set aside ’. The article never got printed in Mother India magazine.
Historian Peter Heehs, a few among those who might have read the document told the researcher, "yes, I have seen it and there is nothing noticeable or important for a researcher. It carries nothing on Sri Aurobindo’s actual vision. Barin was only trying to justify himself on certain areas before his Sejda' (Sri Aurobindo). 16

Finally to conclude, the correct interpretation about Sri Aurobindo’s engagement in politics would be that he carried a deep sense of political understanding and sagacity, encompassing and overpowering all aspects of imagined supernaturality. It remained with Sri Aurobindo until the end making him one of the tallest, if not the highest of Indian thinkers alive during that period and also for times to come. It could be that his contemporary political leaders had rejected most of his suggestions treating him as an ‘outsider in practical politics’ but even today Sri Aurobindo continues to remain one of the key architects of free and united India and the creator of the idea of a democratic and secular republic. Sri Aurobindo always remained alone in his politics and therefore politics too embraced him.
Endnotes (Chapter V)


3. A form of Satyagraha which is self-imposed and not provoked by any individual or political party

4. Aurobindo Sri, On Himself, SAAT, 1972

5. Ibid

6. Aurobindo Sri, India’s Rebirth, Mira Aditi, Mysore, 2006 and Sri Aurobindo, On Himself

7. Heehs Peter, The Lives of Sri Aurobindo, Epilogue, p. 413

8. Letter from Tagore to an unknown recipient, SAAA, Peter Heehs, The Lives et al, p.316

9. A person with ‘godly attributes’

10. A school teacher in central Calcutta and disciple of Sri Ramakrishna, the temple priest of Dakshineshwar Kali Mandir

11. National Geographic, Special Issue on Brain, BBC Knowledge, June, 2013

12. Aurobindo Sri, India’s Rebirth


16. Field research at Pondicherry Ashram and discussion with Peter Heehs at his residence in Pondicherry on 18.01.14