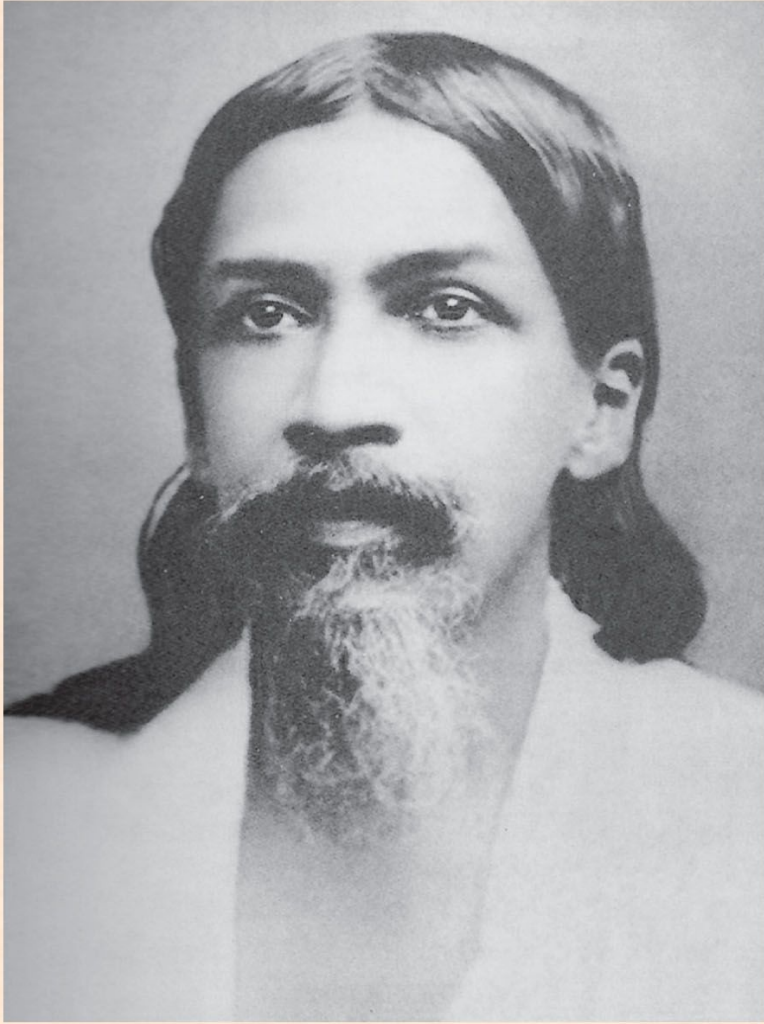

SRI AUROBINDO

A Life Sketch

Institute of Human Study

Hyderabad.



*India must be Reborn, because her Rebirth is Demanded by
the Future of the World*

India cannot perish, our race cannot become extinct, because among all the divisions of mankind it is to India that is reserved the highest and the most splendid destiny, the most essential to the future of the human race. It is she who must send forth from herself the future religion of the entire world, the Eternal Religion which is to harmonise all religion, science and philosophies and make mankind one soul.

Sri Aurobindo

CWSA Vol.6

SRI AUROBINDO - A LIFE SKETCH

Birth and Education

Sri Aurobindo was born on 15 August, 1872 in Calcutta. His father had been among the first to go to England for his education and returned entirely anglicised. He sent his children for the beginning of their education to an Irish nuns' school in Darjeeling and in 1879 took his three sons to England and placed them with the Drewetts in Manchester with strict instructions that they should be kept away from any Indian or Indian influence. Thus, Sri Aurobindo grew up in entire ignorance of India, her people, her religion and her culture.

At home the Drewetts grounded him so well in Latin that the Headmaster of St. Paul's School in London, where he was admitted in 1884, took up Sri Aurobindo himself to ground him in Greek and then pushed him rapidly into the higher classes. In 1890, he left the School with a senior classical scholarship to King's College, Cambridge; in the same year he also passed the entrance competition for the I.C.S.

The three brothers lived in London for some time with the mother of Mr. Drewett. Afterwards, Sri Aurobindo shared a room with his eldest brother in the South Kensington Liberal Club. This was the time of the greatest suffering and poverty. During a whole year a slice or two of sandwich, bread and butter and a cup of tea in the morning and in the evening a penny saveloy formed the only food. Subsequently, Sri Aurobindo also went separately into lodgings until he took up residence at Cambridge.

Sri Aurobindo spent most of his spare time in general reading, especially English poetry, literature and fiction, French literature and the history of ancient, mediaeval and modern Europe; he learnt by himself

German and Italian sufficiently to study Goethe and Dante in the original tongues; he also learnt a little Spanish. He spent much time too in writing poetry. All the same he was able to win all the prizes in King's College in one year for Greek and Latin verse, etc.

He passed the First Part of the Tripos in the first class in his second year at Cambridge which is generally done in the third year. He scored record marks in the final ICS examination in Greek and Latin but felt no call for the ICS and was seeking some way to escape from that bondage. without himself rejecting the Service, he managed to get himself disqualified for failing to take the riding test. His father and Sir Henry Cotton had made arrangements for his posting in Bengal; instead, with the help of Sir Henry's son, James Cotton, Sri Aurobindo met the Gaekwar of Baroda who was then in London and obtained an appointment in the Baroda Service. He left England in January 1893.

In Baroda Service

Sri Aurobindo began work in the Revenue Department and in the Secretariat. Afterwards, in addition to this work, he was asked to teach French at the Baroda College and finally at his own request was appointed Professor of English; later he became the Vice-Principal of the College and was for some time acting Principal. All through, the Maharaja used to call him whenever something had to be written which needed careful wording; he also employed him to prepare some of his public speeches and in other work of a literary or educational character; all this was done in an unofficial capacity.

These were years of self-culture, of literary activity and of preparation for his future work. He learned Sanskrit direct in Sanskrit itself or through English, he also studied several modern Indian languages,

and assimilated the spirit of Indian civilisation and its forms past and present. His acquaintance with these languages made it easy for him to pick up Hindi without any regular study. He had begun to learn Bengali as a probationer for the ICS who had chosen Bengal as his province. The course of study was a very poor one but he learnt enough to appreciate the novels of Bankim and the poetry of Madhusudan. At Baroda he taught himself enough to be able to conduct later a weekly in Bengali, writing most of the articles himself; but his mastery over the language was not at all the same as over English and he did not venture to make speeches in his mother tongue.

A great part of the last years of this period was spent on leave in silent political activity. The outbreak of the agitation against the partition of Bengal in 1905 gave him the opportunity to give up the Service and join openly in the political movement. He left Baroda in 1906 and went to Calcutta as Principal of the newly-founded Bengal National College. Soon, he left the organisation of the College to the educationist Satish Mukherji and plunged fully into politics. He gave up the post for a time in 1907 and finally resigned at the request of the College authorities in 1908.

Revolutionary and Political Thought

At the age of eleven Sri Aurobindo had already received strongly the impression that a period of general upheaval and great revolutionary changes was coming in the world and he himself was destined to play a part in it. This feeling was soon canalised into the idea of the liberation of his own country. His father began sending *The Bengalee* with passages marked relating cases of maltreatment of Indians by Englishmen, and he wrote denouncing the British Government in India in his letters. As a member and for some time secretary of the Indian Majlis at Cambridge Sri Aurobindo delivered many revolutionary speeches which had their

part in the authorities deciding to exclude him from the Indian Civil Service. Sri Aurobindo had studied with interest the struggle against the English in mediaeval France and the revolts which liberated America and Italy. At that time the rifle was still the decisive weapon, and in so vast a country, with proper organisation and help from outside even a guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt might be effective. There was also the possibility of a general revolt in the Indian army. Sri Aurobindo's study of the temperament and characteristics of the British and turn of their political instincts led him to believe that they would resist any attempt at self-liberation, but if the revolt became general and persistent they would in the end try to arrive at an accommodation or in an extremity prefer to grant independence rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands.

In *Desher Katha*, Sakharam Deuskar, a Bengali-Maharashtrian, had compiled all details of India's economic servitude, creating a tremendous repercussion and assisting more than anything else in the preparation of Bengal's Swadeshi movement. It was he who, in a popular biography of Shivaji in Bengali, first used the word *Swaraj*. Sri Aurobindo was the first to use its English equivalent "independence" and reiterate it constantly in his *Bande Mataram* as the one and immediate aim of national politics.

Sri Aurobindo's idea was to capture the Congress and to make it an instrument for revolutionary action; if the Congress could not be captured, then a central revolutionary body would have to be created which could do this work. It was to be a sort of State within the State giving its directions to the people and creating organised bodies and institutions which would be its means of action; there must be an increasing non-cooperation and passive resistance which would render the administration of the country by a foreign Government difficult or finally

impossible, a universal unrest which would wear down repression and finally, if need be, an open revolt all over the country. This plan included a boycott of British trade, the substitution of national schools and colleges for the Government institutions, the creation of arbitration courts to which the people could resort instead of depending on the ordinary courts of law, the creation of volunteer forces which would do the work of police and defence and also be the nucleus of an army of open revolt, and all other action that could make the programme complete.

Sri Aurobindo never concealed his opinion that a nation is entitled to attain its freedom by violence, if it can do so or if there is no other way; whether it should do so or not, depends on what is the best policy, not on ethical considerations. His position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders.

Political Writings

The public activity of Sri Aurobindo began in 1893 with the writing of the articles in the *Indu Prakash*. These nine articles written under the caption "New Lamps for Old", at the instance of KG Deshpande, editor of the paper and Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge friend, vehemently denounced the then Congress policy and called for a dynamic leadership based upon self-help and fearlessness. But this outspoken and irrefutable criticism was checked by the action of M.G. Ranade. Finally, Sri Aurobindo worked only in secret till 1905, but in 1902 he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress.

In 1906, Bepin Pal, who had long been an advocate of self-help and non-cooperation, started an English daily with the name of *Bande Mataram* and asked Sri Aurobindo to join him. When Sri Aurobindo

encouraged the forward group of young men in the Bengal Congress to join hands with the corresponding group in Maharashtra and form a new political party under the proclaimed leadership of Tilak, he also persuaded them to take up the *Bande Mataram* daily as their party organ and a Bande Mataram Company was started to finance the paper which soon began to circulate throughout India. On its staff were not only Bepin Pal and Sri Aurobindo but some other very able writers, like Shyam Sundar Chakravarty, Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Bejoy Chatterjee. Pal was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator, but he was opposed to revolutionary action with which the others sympathised and had to leave the paper. Henceforward, Sri Aurobindo controlled the policy of the *Bande Mataram* along with that of the party in Bengal.

Sri Aurobindo declared and developed in the *Bande Mataram* a new national programme. He wrote a series on passive resistance, a new political philosophy of revolution, and many leading articles aimed at destroying Congress shibboleths and superstitions such as the belief in British justice and benefits bestowed by the foreign government, faith in its law courts, in the adequacy of the education provided in its schools and universities, and stressed more strongly and persistently than had been done the emasculation, stagnation or slow progress, poverty, economic dependence, absence of a rich industrial activity and all other evil results of a foreign government; he insisted especially that even if an alien rule were benevolent and beneficent, that could not be a substitute for a free and healthy national life. But he never brought any rancour into his politics. He never had any hatred for England or the English people; he based his claim for freedom for India on the inherent right to freedom, not on any charge of misgovernment or oppression; if he attacked persons

even violently, it was for their views or political action, not from any other motive.

During its brief but momentous existence, the *Bande Mataram* changed the political thinking of India. But the struggle initiated on these lines, though vehement and eventful and full of importance for the future, did not last long at the time; for the country was still unripe for so bold a programme. Yet it converted the mind of the people and prepared it for revolution; sedition was patently visible between every line, but it was so skilfully written that no legal action could be taken. Sri Aurobindo always took care to give no handle either for a prosecution for sedition or any other drastic action fatal to its existence. But the *Bande Mataram*'s weakness was on the financial side; and when he was arrested and held in jail, its economic situation became desperate and a glorious death was invited by publishing an openly seditious article for which Government stopped the paper in August 1909.

In 1906, at his brother Barin's suggestion, Sri Aurobindo started a Bengali paper, *Yugantar*, which was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and always exercised a general control. It had as its chief writers and directors some of the ablest younger writers in Bengal, and it at once acquired an immense influence throughout Bengal.

In May 1909, when Sri Aurobindo was released from detention after his acquittal, most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or in self-imposed exile and there was a general discouragement and depression. He was determined to continue the struggle and held weekly meetings in Calcutta and in the districts, but the enthusiasm had sharply dwindled. In

order to aid his efforts, he started two weeklies, the *Karmayogin* in English and *Dharma* in Bengali, both of which had a fairly large circulation and were, unlike the *Bande Mataram*, easily self-supporting. But at last he was compelled to recognise that the nation was not yet sufficiently trained to carry out his policy and programme.

In February 1910, when he was on his way to Pondicherry, a third prosecution was launched against him for a signed article in the *Karmayogin*; in his absence it was pressed against the printer of the paper who was convicted, but the conviction was quashed on appeal in the High Court of Calcutta. For the third time a prosecution against him had failed.

Revolutionary Activities

In 1893, soon after returning to India Sri Aurobindo found some very small secret societies in Bengal. He tried to unite them with a common programme but the union was never complete and did not last, though the movement itself grew. Meanwhile, he had met a member of a secret society in Western India headed by a Thakur of the Udaipur State who together with several prominent Maratha politicians formed a Council to help him in organising Maharashtra and the Maratha States. The Thakur himself had already won over a few regiments of the Indian Army. Aurobindo contacted and joined this society somewhere in 1902-3 and made a special journey to meet and speak with Indian sub-officers and men of one of these regiments. His later action was not pursued under any directions by this Council, but he took up on his own responsibility the task of generalising support for its objects in Bengal where as yet it had no membership or following.

In spite of the Government's ban against enlistment of any Bengali in any army in India, with the help of his friends in the Baroda Army

Aurobindo enlisted Jatin Bannerji, an energetic and capable young Bengali, as a trooper in the cavalry regiment. He then sent him to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might occupy a period of 30 years before fruition could become possible. Jatin formed a first group in Calcutta and also entered into relations with P. Mitter (who like Bepin Pal and several other prominent leaders of the new movement, had a spiritual life and aspiration and a strong religious feeling) and other revolutionaries already at work in the province. Jatin was joined afterwards by Sri Aurobindo's brother Barin. (It may be noted that their secret society did not include terrorism in its programme, but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the strong repression by the Government.)

The idea was to establish secretly or under various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruitment throughout Bengal. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village and members trained in riding, physical training, drill and organised movement. The already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet any clear idea or settled programme were contacted leading to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action. When Sri Aurobindo toured the districts where these centres operated, he saw that secret action or preparation by itself was not likely to be effective if there were not also a wide public movement which would create a universal patriotic fervour and popularise the idea of independence as the ideal and aim of Indian politics. Sri Aurobindo's activities were then turned more and more in this direction and the secret action became a secondary and subordinate element.

In May, 1908, he was arrested in the Alipur Conspiracy Case as implicated in the doings of the revolutionary group led by his brother Barindara; but no evidence of any value could be established against him and he was acquitted.

In Pondicherry, he dropped all participation in any public political activity though for some years he kept up some private communication with the revolutionary forces he had led, but this also he dropped after he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of forces of which he became aware.

Political Action

Sri Aurobindo always preferred to remain and act and even to lead from behind the scenes. He began by grouping people who accepted the idea of independence and were prepared to take up appropriate action. He also joined some of the more advanced leaders to organise bodies for political action; this work took a regular shape in or about 1902. He was present at the Congress in 1904, and in 1906 he took leave from Baroda service for carrying on personally the secret revolutionary work, and attending the Barisal Conference. Later he toured East Bengal along with Bepin Pal where enormous meetings were held, some despite government prohibition.

There was an unorganised section of the Congress, mostly “young men of extremer views, strong in Maharashtra but still small and weak elsewhere, which had not yet gone farther than some ineffective clashes with the Moderate leaders at the annual assembly, behind the veil of the Subjects Committee. Sri Aurobindo persuaded its chiefs in Bengal to take public position as a party with Tilak as its leader. The new-born Nationalist party put forward Swaraj as its goal against the Moderate hope of colonial self-government to be realised at a distant date of a century or two by a slow progress of reform; and it adopted a programme of Swadeshi, Boycott and National Education. It was to attack the oligarchy of veteran Moderates and capture from them the Congress and

the country. In two years their historic struggle changed the face of Indian politics.

The first public clash took place at Calcutta in December 1906. Though still working unofficially, Sri Aurobindo took part in the severe tussle that took place behind the scenes where the Moderate leaders were obliged to incorporate the new party's fourfold programme in the official Congress Resolutions. In August 1907, he was prosecuted for a letter written to the Editor of *Bande Mataram* but was acquitted. This event ultimately obliged him to come forward as the acknowledged head of the Nationalists in Bengal and at the Bengal Provincial Conference at Midnapore he acted publicly as their leader.

The third clash, at the annual sessions at Surat in December 1907, led to a final break with the Moderates. The Congress had first been arranged at Nagpur. But, as it was predominantly a Maratha city and violently extremist the Moderates shifted the venue to Surat which was a stronghold of Moderatism. The Nationalists, however came there in strength from all parts of the country. They held a public conference with Sri Aurobindo as President and for some time it was doubtful which side would have the majority in the open sessions. It was known that the Moderate leaders had prepared a new constitution for the Congress which would make it practically impossible for the extreme party to command a majority at any annual session for many years to come. The younger Nationalists, especially those from Maharashtra, were determined to prevent this by any means and it was decided by them to break the Congress if they could not swamp it; this decision was unknown to Tilak and the older leaders. But, it was known to Sri Aurobindo. At the sessions Tilak went on to the platform to propose a resolution regarding the presidentship of the Congress; the President appointed by the Moderates refused him

the permission to speak, but Tilak insisted on his right and began to read his resolution and speak. There was a tremendous uproar, the young Gujarati volunteers lifted up chairs over the head of Tilak to beat him. At that the Marathas became furious, a Maratha shoe came hurtling across the pavilion aimed at the President and hit Surendra Nath Bannerji on the shoulder. The young Marathas in a body charged up to the platform, the Moderate leaders fled; after a short fight on the platform with chairs, the session broke up not to be resumed.

Actually, it was Sri Aurobindo who, without consulting Tilak, had given the order that led to the breaking of the Congress. Meanwhile, Lajpatrai came to Tilak and informed him that the Government had decided, if the Congress split, to crush the Nationalists by the most ruthless repression. Tilak thought, and the events proved that he was right, that the country was not yet ready to survive such a repression and he wanted the Nationalists to sign the statement of adherence to the new constitution demanded by the Moderates. Sri Aurobindo and some other leaders were opposed to this submission; they did not believe that the Moderates would admit any Nationalists to their conference (and this proved to be the case) and they wanted the country to be asked to face the repression. Thus, the Congress ceased for a time to exist; but the Moderate Conference was not a success and was attended only by small and always dwindling numbers.

Sri Aurobindo had hoped that the country would be strong enough to face the repression, at least in Bengal and Maharashtra, where the enthusiasm had become intense and almost universal; but he thought also that even if there was a temporary collapse the repression would create a deep change in the hearts and minds of the people and the whole nation would swing over to Nationalism and the ideal of independence. This

actually happened and when in 1914, Tilak returned from jail in Burma, he was able in conjunction with Mrs. Besant not only to revive the Congress but to make it representative of a nation pledged to the Nationalist cause.

In January 1908, on his way back from Surat to Calcutta, Aurobindo stopped at several places in Maharashtra and the Central Provinces to address large meetings. He led the party again at the Provincial Conference at Hooghly in March. There in the Subjects Committee, Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatising the Reforms as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. But the Moderate leaders threatened to secede if this was maintained and so at the public session he explained his decision to allow the Moderate resolution to pass so as to keep a degree of unity in the political forces of Bengal. The Nationalist delegates left the hall quietly at his order to avoid voting either for or against the Moderate resolution causing much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of the Moderate leaders.

By May 1909, when Sri Aurobindo came out from jail, the Nationalist leaders had been scattered by imprisonment, deportation or self-imposed exile and the party itself dumb and dispirited and incapable of any strenuous action. For almost a year he strove singlehanded to revive the movement, holding weekly meetings in Calcutta and in the districts, but the attendance formerly in thousands was now only in hundreds. He attended and spoke at the Provincial Conference at Barisal. There S.N. Bannerji invited Sri Aurobindo and one or two other Nationalist leaders to a private meeting to discuss his project of uniting the two parties at the annual session in Benaras. As it would have necessitated the Nationalists being appointed delegates by the Bengal Moderates and

accepting the constitution imposed at Surat, Sri Aurobindo refused to comply.

Meanwhile the Government was determined to get rid of Aurobindo as the only serious obstacle left to the success of their repressive policy. As they could not send him to the Andamans [which would have come about if he had been convicted in the Bomb Case] they decided to deport him. This came to the knowledge of Sister Nivedita and she asked him to leave British India and work from outside. Sri Aurobindo contented himself with publishing an “Open Letter to My Countrymen” on 31 July where he spoke of this project of deportation and left what he called his last will and testament. As he had hoped this killed the idea of deportation. Finally Government found an opportunity for prosecution for sedition when Sri Aurobindo published in the same paper another signed article, “To My Countrymen”, on 25th December reviewing the political situation. Later on the Court refused to regard it as seditious and acquitted the printer who had been prosecuted in the absence of the editor.

About this time Sri Aurobindo began to consider how to revive the national movement, whether it would not be necessary for a time to draw back a little in order to make a continued political action possible, *reculer pour mieux sauter*. There was the possibility of falling back on a Home Rule movement or one of the South African type which the Government could not repress, but this would have meant a postponement of the ideal of complete independence. He foresaw that they might be resorted to in the near future; but he decided that such movements were not for him to lead and that he must go on with the movement as it was. Moreover, since his detention in jail, which had been spent entirely in the practice of Yoga, his inner spiritual life was pressing upon him for an exclusive concentration. He resolved therefore to withdraw from the political field, at least for a time.

At no time did he consent to have anything to do with the sham Morley-Minto Reforms [which among other things introduced communal electorates]. It was only if real political, administrative and financial control were given to popular ministers in an elected Assembly that Sri Aurobindo would have anything to do with offers from the British Government. In his Open Letter of July, he held up the slogan of “no co-operation without control”. In the second one also he rejected the reforms and advocated a continuance and reorganisation of the Nationalist movement.

One night, in February 1910, Sri Aurobindo at the *Karmayogin* office received information of the Government’s intention to search the office and arrest him. While considering what should be his attitude, he received a sudden command from above to go to Chandernagore in French India. In a few hours he was at Chandernagore where he plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity. Then there came to him an Adesh to proceed to Pondicherry where he arrived on April 4, 1910.

Sri Aurobindo had left Bengal with some intention of returning to the political field under more favourable circumstances; but very soon realising the magnitude of the spiritual work he had taken up he saw that it would need the exclusive concentration of all his energies. Eventually he cut off connection with politics, refused repeatedly to accept the Presidentship of the National Congress and went into a complete retirement.

Results of his Political Policy and Action

The part Sri Aurobindo took publicly in Indian politics was of brief duration but it changed the whole face of Indian politics and the whole spirit of the Indian people by making independence its aim and non-

cooperation and resistance its method, and even an imperfect application of this policy heightening into sporadic periods of revolt has been sufficient to bring about the victory.

Swadeshi and Boycott were the most important practical items of the Nationalist programme. Sri Aurobindo wished to gain the financial support of landed magnates and create an organisation to direct operations and devise means but he was told that these people were too timid to join, and big industrialists, manufacturers and commercial men were all on the side of the status quo. Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were in favour of an effective boycott of British goods with imports made from Germany and Austria and America so that the fullest pressure might be brought upon England. They were for national self-sufficiency in key industries, the production of necessities and of all manufactures of which India had the natural means, but complete self-sufficiency or autarchy did not seem practicable or even desirable since a free India would need to export goods as well as supply them for internal consumption and for that she must import as well and maintain an international exchange.

National Education: Sri Aurobindo had been disgusted with the education given by the British system, for it dulls and impoverishes and ties up the naturally quick and brilliant and supple Indian intelligence, teaching it bad intellectual habits and spoiling by narrow information and mechanical instruction its originality and productivity. The movement for a national education began well but its development was insufficient, for in the repression and the general depression, most of the schools failed to survive. Finally, Sri Aurobindo decided to take up the movement personally but his sudden departure from Bengal cut short this plan.

Arbitration: The idea of people's courts was taken up and worked in some districts, not without success, but this too perished in the storm of Government repression.

National Volunteers: The idea of volunteer groupings had a stronger vitality; it lived on, took shape, multiplied its formations and its workers were the spearhead of the movement of direct action which broke out from time to time in the struggle for freedom.

The purely political elements of the Nationalist programme and activities were those which lasted and after each wave of repression and depression renewed the thread of the life of the movement for liberation and kept it recognisably one throughout nearly fifty years of its struggle. But the greatest thing done in those years (1902-10) was the creation of a new spirit in the country. In the enthusiasm that swept surging everywhere with the cry of "Bande Mataram" ringing on all sides men felt it glorious to be alive and dare and act together and hope; the old apathy and timidity was broken and a force created which nothing could destroy and which rose again and again in wave after wave till it carried India to the beginning of a complete victory.

Public Actions after 1910

In his retirement Sri Aurobindo kept a close watch on all that was happening in the world and in India and actively intervened whenever necessary, but solely with a spiritual force and silent spiritual action. Twice, however, he found it advisable to take in addition other action of a public kind.

The first was in relation to the Second World War. When it appeared as if Hitler would crush all the forces opposed to him and Nazism dominate

the world, he began to intervene. He declared himself publicly on the side of the Allies, made some financial contributions in answer to the appeal for funds and encouraged those who sought his advice to enter the army or share in the war effort. Inwardly, he put his spiritual force behind the Allies from the moment of Dunkirk and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of war begin to turn in the opposite direction. This he did, because he saw that behind Hitler and Nazism were dark Asuric forces and that their success would mean the enslavement of mankind to the tyranny of evil, and a set-back to the course of evolution and especially to the spiritual evolution of mankind: it would lead also to the enslavement not only of Europe but of Asia, and in it of India, an enslavement far more terrible than any this country had ever endured, and the undoing of all the work that had been done for her liberation.

It was this reason also that induced him to support publicly the Cripps' offer and to press the Congress leaders to accept it. He had not, for various reasons, intervened with his spiritual force against the Japanese aggression until it became evident that Japan intended to attack and even invade and conquer India. He supported the Cripps' offer because by its acceptance India and Britain could stand united against the Asuric forces and the solution of Cripps could be used as a step towards independence. When negotiations failed, Sri Aurobindo returned to his reliance on the use of spiritual force alone against the aggressor and had the satisfaction of seeing the tide of Japanese victory change immediately into a tide of rapid, crushing and finally immense and overwhelming defeat. He had also after a time the satisfaction of seeing his previsions about the future of India justify themselves so that she stands independent with whatever internal difficulties.

HIS SPIRITUAL LIFE

“I was a poet and a politician, not a philosopher”, Sri Aurobindo wrote to a disciple in 1934. Even before 1904, when he began his practice of yoga, several inner experiences had come to him spontaneously, “of themselves and with a sudden unexpectedness”. There was, for instance, the mental experience of the *atman* or true Self, which he had while reading the Upanishads in London in 1892. The next year a “vast calm” descended upon him the moment he stepped on Indian soil at Apollo Bunder in Bombay, after his long absence in England. This calm surrounded him and remained for many months afterwards. Also, in 1893 Sri Aurobindo had a vision of the Godhead surging up from within when he was in danger of a carriage accident in Baroda. In 1903, while walking on the ridge of Shankaracharya Hill (renamed Takht-i-Suleman) in Kashmir (later also on the Parvati Hill in Poona), he had the “realisation of the vacant Infinite”. A year or two later he experienced the “living presence of Kali” in a shrine in Karnali on the banks of the Narmada.

While in Baroda, Sri Aurobindo had also witnessed several manifestations of occult powers among Naga sannyasis. He got in touch with a member of their governing body who gave him a *stotra* of Kali and conducted certain *kriya* and a Vedic *yajna* for the success of his political mission. He wanted to acquire such yogic powers in order to liberate his countrymen and not just for personal salvation. From the very first such an idea “did not seem anything like a supreme aim...; a solitary salvation leaving the world to its fate was felt as almost distasteful”.

In 1904 Sri Aurobindo began yoga with the “assiduous practice of *pranayama*”. Around this time he met the yogi Brahmananda and was “greatly impressed by him”, but he had no helper or guru in yoga until

January 1908, when he met the Maharashtrian yogi Vishnu Bhaskar Lele. Lele showed Sri Aurobindo how to establish complete silence of mind and immobility of consciousness. Within three days Sri Aurobindo succeeded in achieving this state that sometimes requires a lifetime of yoga to attain. The result was a series of “lasting and massive spiritual realisations which opened to him the larger ways of yoga”. Lele finally told Sri Aurobindo to put himself entirely into the hands of the Divine within and to move only as he was moved by Him. This henceforward became the whole foundation and principle of Sri Aurobindo’s sadhana. Sri Aurobindo and Lele parted ways after a month or two, and from this time until the Mother came to India Sri Aurobindo received no spiritual help from anyone.

In 1908 and 1909, while Sri Aurobindo was an undertrial prisoner in the Alipur Jail, he had the constant vision of the omnipresent Godhead: “I looked at the jail that secluded me from men and it was no longer by its high walls that I was imprisoned; no, it was Vasudeva who surrounded me. I walked under the branches of the tree in front of my cell, but it was not a tree, I knew it was Vasudeva, it was Sri Krishna whom I saw standing there and holding over me his shade. I looked at the bars of my cell, the very grating that did duty for a door and again I saw Vasudeva. It was Narayana who was guarding and standing sentry over me. Or I lay on the coarse blankets that were given me for a couch and felt the arms of Sri Krishna around me, the arms of my Friend and Lover.... I looked at the prisoners in the jail, the thieves, the murderers, the swindlers, and as I looked at them I saw Vasudeva, it was Narayana whom I found in these darkened souls and misused bodies.”

In the jail Sri Aurobindo spent much of his time reading the Gita and Upanishads, meditating and practising yoga. Even in the courtroom

he remained absorbed in meditation, attending little to the trial and hardly listening to the evidence. During this period his view of life was radically changed; he had originally taken up yoga with the idea of acquiring spiritual force and energy and divine guidance for his political work. But now his inner spiritual life and realisation, which was continually increasing in magnitude and universality, assumed a larger place and took him up entirely. His work became a part and result of it, far exceeding in its scope the service and liberation of the country; it fixed itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity.

Sri Aurobindo's yoga and spiritual philosophy are founded on four great realisations. Two of these he had realised in full before his coming to Pondicherry in 1910. The first, the realisation of the silent, spaceless and timeless Brahman, he had gained while meditating with Lele in 1908. The feeling and perception of the total unreality of the world which at first attended this realisation disappeared after the second realisation, which was gained in the Alipur Jail in 1908 or 1909 — the realisation of the cosmic consciousness and the vision of the Divine as all beings and as all that is. In his meditations in the jail Sri Aurobindo was already on his way to the other two realisations — that of the supreme Reality with the static and dynamic Brahman as its two aspects and that of the higher planes of consciousness leading to the Supermind. By 1912, the third realisation was attained when Sri Aurobindo experienced an “abiding realisation and dwelling in Parabrahman” (the supreme Reality).

In 1914, after four years of silent Yoga he began the publication of a philosophical monthly, the *Arya*. Most of his more important works, *The Life Divine*, *The Synthesis of Yoga*, *Essays on the Gita*, *The Isha Upanishad*, appeared serially in the *Arya*. These works embodied much

of the inner knowledge that had come to him in his practice of Yoga. Others were concerned with the spirit and significance of Indian civilisation and culture (*The Foundations of Indian Culture*), the true meaning of the Vedas (*The Secret of the Veda*), the progress of human society (*The Human Cycle*), the nature and evolution of poetry (*The Future Poetry*), the possibility of the unification of the human race (*The Ideal of Human Unity*). The *Arya* ceased publication in 1921 after six and half years of uninterrupted appearance.

All the time, equally uninterrupted by any of the surface movements, the process of ascent into the higher planes of consciousness and of bringing down the power of those planes into the physical consciousness continued. His sadhana exemplified his dictum “All life is Yoga”. It was not confined to a single line of experience nor was it tied down to a single practice or set of practices but made use of life in all its variety.

When Sri Aurobindo had come to Pondicherry, Sri Krishna, “who was the guide of my Yoga”, had indicated in detail the program Sri Aurobindo was to follow. On 24 November 1926, this effort was crowned by the descent of Sri Krishna, the Godhead of the Overmind, the highest of the planes between the Mind and Supermind, into the physical. This descent was preparatory to the descent of the Supermind itself, by which “the perfection dreamed of by all that is highest in humanity can come”.

But self-realization was not the only aim of Sri Aurobindo’s yoga. In 1911, he wrote: “The principal object of my Yoga is to remove absolutely and entirely every possible source of error and ineffectiveness, of error in order that the Truth I shall eventually show to men may be perfect, and of ineffectiveness in order that the work of changing the world, so far as I have to assist it, may be entirely victorious and

irresistible.” Only the descent and direct action of the Supramental in earth-nature could achieve this transformation of life and existence. It was with this in mind that he declared, “Our Yoga is not a retreading of old walks, but a spiritual adventure.” He devoted the rest of his life “hewing out a road” in uncharted regions, and in 1950 left his physical body to hasten the advent of the Supramental.

Sri Aurobindo is constantly among us and reveals himself to those who are ready to see him and hear him.

— The Mother

A SKETCH OF THE MOTHER’S LIFE

The Mother was born in Paris on 21 February, 1878. Mirra, as the child was named, was the daughter of the banker Maurice Alfassa (born in Adrianople, Turkey, in 1843), and Mathilde Ismaloun (born in Alexandria, Egypt, in 1876) emigrated from Egypt to France a year before Mirra’s birth. Her early education was given at home. In 1893, she joined an art studio in Paris where she studied for several years. Besides being an accomplished painter (some of her works were exhibited at the Paris Salon), the Mother was a talented musician and writer.

Concerning her early spiritual life, the Mother has said: “Between eleven and thirteen a series of psychic and spiritual experiences revealed to me not only the existence of God but man’s possibility of uniting with Him, of reaising Him integrally in consciousness and action, of manifesting Him upon earth in a life divine”. In 1906 and 1907, the Mother journeyed to Tlemcen, Algeria, to study occultism with the Polish adept Max Theon and his wife. She started her first group of spiritual seekers in 1906 in Paris. Between 1911 and 1913 she gave talks to various groups there.

At the age of thirty-six the Mother came to Pondicherry. Here, on 29 March 1914, she met Sri Aurobindo. At once she recognised him as the Master who for many years had inwardly been guiding her spiritual development. After staying in India for eleven months, she was obliged to return to France because of the First World War. She left France after about a year, and lived for almost four years in Japan. On 24 April, 1920 the Mother returned to Pondicherry and resumed her collaboration with Sri Aurobindo. She remained in India for the rest of her life.

At the time the Mother rejoined Sri Aurobindo, a small group of disciples had gathered around him. After her coming the number of disciples increased. Eventually this informal grouping took shape as an ashram or spiritual community.

From its very beginning in November 1926, Sri Aurobindo entrusted the full material and spiritual charge of the Sri Aurobindo Ashram to the Mother. Under her guidance, which extended over nearly fifty years, the Ashram has grown into a many faceted community. The Mother also founded the Sri Aurobindo International Centre of Education in 1951 and the international township Auroville, in 1968. On 17 November 1973, at the age of ninety five the Mother left her body.



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The Institute, since its inception in 1964, is entirely dedicated to Sri Aurobindo by means of offering Education at all levels through Sri Aurobindo International School, Sri Aurobindo Studies, Community Awareness, Seminars, Conferences and Publishing books and Periodicals.

Aims and Objectives :

- To organize education at all levels in the manner that ensures the emergence of the soul as the ruler of human personality.
- To study the writings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother and facilitate the same for those who seek to perfect the individual and the society in the interest of an integral life dedicated to the Divine.