

Sri Aurobindo Political Life

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Abstract

Aurobindo Ghosh was a yogi, a liberation fighter, a distinguished educator, and a profound and innovative thinker. He initially emerged as a political theorist before evolving into a spiritual integralist. Shri Aurobindo significantly contributed to the implementation of reforms to ensure that subsequent generations might benefit from his educational theories and methodologies. This research study discussed his participation as a politician and the significance of his ideas in the Indian political context.

Keywords: Yogi, Political, Indian

Introduction

Sri Aurobindo (1872–1950) stands as one of the most profound figures in India's modern history a revolutionary nationalist, philosopher, poet, and spiritual visionary who played a decisive role in shaping the early struggle for India's freedom. Before he became known as a seer and spiritual guide, Aurobindo emerged as one of the most fearless leaders of the national movement against British rule. His political life, though relatively brief between 1893 and 1910, was marked by extraordinary intellectual depth, courage, and a vision that transcended the immediate goal of political independence.

The study of Sri Aurobindo's political life reveals the unique synthesis of nationalism, idealism, and spirituality. His political vision went beyond territorial independence; it sought the moral and spiritual regeneration of the nation. Understanding this evolution from revolutionary activism to spiritual nationalism is essential to grasp the true depth of India's freedom movement and the enduring legacy of Sri Aurobindo as both a political leader and a visionary of human destiny.

Political Life

There were three sides to Sri Aurobindo's political ideas and activities. First, there was the action with which he started, a secret revolutionary propaganda and organisation of which the central object was the preparation of an armed insurrection. Secondly, there was a public propaganda intended to convert the whole nation to the ideal of independence which was regarded, when he entered into politics, by the vast majority of Indians as unpractical and impossible, an almost insane chimera. It was thought that the British Empire was too powerful and India too weak, effectively disarmed and impotent even to dream of the success of such an endeavour. Thirdly, there was the organisation of the people to carry on a public and united opposition and undermining of the foreign rule through an increasing noncooperation and passive resistance.

At that time the military organisation of the great empires and their means of military action were not so overwhelming and apparently irresistible as they now are: the rifle was still the decisive weapon, air power had not developed and the force of artillery was not so devastating as it afterwards became. India was disarmed, but Sri Aurobindo thought that with proper organisation and help from outside this difficulty might be overcome and in so vast a country as India and with the smallness of the regular British armies, even a guerrilla warfare accompanied by general resistance and revolt might be effective. There was also the possibility of a great revolt in the Indian army. At the same time he had studied the temperament and characteristics of the British people and the turn of their political instincts, and he believed that although they would resist any attempt at self-liberation by the Indian people and would at the most only concede very slowly such reforms as would not weaken their imperial control, still they were not of the kind which would be ruthlessly adamant to the end: if they found resistance and revolt becoming general and persistent they would in the end try to arrive at an accommodation to save what they could of their empire or in an extremity prefer to grant independence rather than have it forcefully wrested from their hands.

In some quarters there is the idea that Sri Aurobindo's political standpoint was entirely pacifist, that he was opposed in principle and in practice to all violence and that he denounced terrorism, insurrection etc. as entirely forbidden by the spirit and letter of the Hindu religion. It is even suggested that he was a forerunner of the gospel of Ahimsa. This is quite incorrect. Sri Aurobindo is neither an impotent moralist nor a weak pacifist.

The rule of confining political action to passive resistance was adopted as the best policy for the National Movement at that stage and not as a part of a gospel of Non-violence or pacific idealism. Peace is a part of the highest ideal, but it must be spiritual or at the very least psychological in its basis; without a change in human nature it cannot come with any finality. If it is attempted on any other basis (moral principle or gospel of Ahimsa or any other) it will fail, and even may leave things worse than before. He is in favour of an attempt to put down war by international agreement and international force, what is now contemplated in the "New Order", if that proves possible, but that would not be Ahimsa, it would be a putting down of anarchic force by legal force, and even then one cannot be sure that it would be permanent. Within nations this sort of peace has been secured, but it does not prevent occasional civil wars and revolutions and political outbreaks and repressions, sometimes of a sanguinary character. The same might happen to a similar world-peace. Sri Aurobindo has 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. Sri Aurobindo's position and practice in this matter was the same as Tilak's and that of other Nationalist leaders who were by no means Pacifists or worshippers of Ahimsa.¹

For the first few years in India, Sri Aurobindo abstained from any political activity (except the writing of the articles in the **Indu Prakash**) and studied the conditions in the country so that he might be able to judge more maturely what could be done. Then he made his first move when he sent a young Bengali soldier of the Baroda army, Jatin Banerji, as his lieutenant to Bengal with a programme of preparation and action which he thought might occupy a period of 30 years before fruition could become possible. As a matter of fact it has taken 50 years for the movement of liberation to arrive at fruition and the beginning of complete success. The idea was to establish secretly or, as far as visible action could be taken, under

various pretexts and covers, revolutionary propaganda and recruiting throughout Bengal. This was to be done among the youth of the country while sympathy and support and financial and other assistance were to be obtained from the older men who had advanced views or could be won over to them. Centres were to be established in every town and eventually in every village. Societies of young men were to be established with various ostensible objects, cultural, intellectual or moral and those already existing were to be won over for revolutionary use. Young men were to be trained in activities which might be helpful for ultimate military action, such as riding, physical training, athletics of various kinds, drill and organised movement. As soon as the idea was sown it attained a rapid prosperity; already existing small groups and associations of young men who had not yet the clear idea or any settled programme of revolution began to turn in this direction and a few who had already the revolutionary aim were contacted and soon developed activity on organised lines; the few rapidly became many. Meanwhile Sri Aurobindo had met a member of the Secret Society in Western India, and taken the oath of the Society and had been introduced to the Council in Bombay. His future 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. He spoke of the Society and its aim to P. Mitter and other leading men of the revolutionary group in Bengal and they took the oath of the Society and agreed to carry out its objects on the lines suggested by Sri Aurobindo. The special cover used by Mitter's group was association for lathi play which had already been popularised to some extent by Sarala Ghoshal in Bengal among the young men; but other groups used other ostensible covers. Sri Aurobindo's attempt at a close organisation of the whole movement did not succeed, but the movement itself did not suffer by that, for the general idea was taken up and activity of many separate groups led to a greater and more widespread diffusion of the revolutionary drive and its action. Afterwards there came the partition of Bengal and a general outburst of revolt which favoured the rise of the extremist party and the great nationalist movement. Sri Aurobindo's activities were then turned more and more in this direction and the secret action became a secondary and subordinate element. He took advantage, however, of the Swadeshi movement to popularise the idea of violent revolt in the future. At Barin's suggestion he agreed to the starting of a paper, **Yugantar**, which was to preach open revolt and the absolute denial of the British rule and include such items as a series of articles containing instructions for guerrilla warfare. Sri Aurobindo himself wrote some of the opening articles in the early numbers and he always exercised a general control; when a member of the sub-editorial staff, Swami Vivekananda's brother, presented himself on his own motion to the police in a search as the editor of the paper and was prosecuted, the **Yugantar** under Sri Aurobindo's orders adopted the policy of refusing to defend itself in a British Court on the ground that it did not recognise the foreign Government and this immensely increased the prestige and influence of the paper. It had as its chief writers and directors three of the ablest younger writers in Bengal, and it at once acquired an immense influence throughout Bengal. It may be noted that the Secret Society did not include terrorism in its programme but this element grew up in Bengal as a result of the strong repression and the reaction to it in that province.

The public activity of Sri Aurobindo began with the writing of the articles in the **Indu Prakash**. These [nine]² articles written at the instance of K. G. Deshpande, editor of the paper

and Sri Aurobindo's Cambridge friend, under the caption "New Lamps for Old" vehemently denounced the then congress policy of pray, petition and protest and called for a dynamic leadership based upon self-help and fearlessness. But this outspoken and irrefutable criticism was checked by the action of a Moderate leader who frightened the editor and thus prevented any full development of his ideas in the paper; he had to turn aside to generalities such as the necessity of extending the activities of the Congress beyond the circle of the bourgeois or middle class and calling into it the masses. Finally, Sri Aurobindo suspended all public activity of this kind and worked only in secret till 1905, but he contacted Tilak whom he regarded as the one possible leader for a revolutionary party and met him at the Ahmedabad Congress; there Tilak took him out of the pandal and talked to him for an hour in the grounds expressing his contempt for the Reformist movement and explaining his own line of action in Maharashtra.

Sri Aurobindo included in the scope of his revolutionary work one kind of activity which afterwards became an important item in the public programme of the Nationalist party. He encouraged the young men in the centres of work to propagate the Swadeshi idea which at that time was only in its infancy and hardly more than a fad of the few. One of the ablest men in these revolutionary groups was a Mahratta named Sakharam Ganesh Deuskar who was an able writer in Bengali (his family had been long domiciled in Bengal) and who had written a popular life of Shivaji in Bengali in which he first brought in the name of Swaraj, afterwards adopted by the Nationalists as their word for independence,—Swaraj became one item of the fourfold Nationalist programme. He published a book entitled **Desher Katha** describing in exhaustive detail the British commercial and industrial exploitation of India. This book had an immense repercussion in Bengal, captured the mind of young Bengal and assisted more than anything else in the preparation of the Swadeshi movement. Sri Aurobindo himself had always considered the shaking off of this economic yoke and the development of Indian trade and industry as a necessary concomitant of the revolutionary endeavour.

As long as he was in the Baroda service, Sri Aurobindo could not take part publicly in politics. Apart from that, he preferred to remain and act and even to lead from behind the scenes without his name being known in public; it was the Government's action in prosecuting him as editor of the **Bande Mataram** that forced him into public view. And from that time forward he became openly, what he had been for sometime already, a prominent leader of the Nationalist party, its principal leader in action in Bengal and the organiser there of its policy and strategy. He had decided in his mind the lines on which he wanted the country's action to run: what he planned was very much the same as was developed afterwards in Ireland as the Sinn Fein movement; but Sri Aurobindo did not derive his ideas, as some have represented, from Ireland, for the Irish movement became prominent later and he knew nothing of it till after he had withdrawn to Pondicherry. There was moreover a capital difference between India and Ireland which made his work much more difficult; for all its past history had accustomed the Irish people to rebellion against British rule and this history might be even described as a constant struggle for independence intermittent in its action but permanently there in principle; there was nothing of this kind in India. Sri Aurobindo had to establish and generalise the idea of independence in the mind of the Indian people and at the same time to push first a party and then the whole nation into an intense and organised political activity which would lead to the accomplishment of that ideal. His idea was to capture the Congress and to make it an instrument for revolutionary action instead of a centre of a timid constitutional agitation which would only

talk and pass resolutions and recommendations to the foreign Government; 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 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 be the nucleus of an army of open revolt, and all other action that could make the programme complete. The part Sri Aurobindo took publicly in Indian politics was of brief duration, for he turned aside from it in 1910 and withdrew to Pondicherry; much of his programme lapsed in his absence, but enough had been done to change the whole face of Indian politics and the whole spirit of the Indian people, to make 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. The course of subsequent events followed largely the line of Sri Aurobindo's idea. The Congress was finally captured by the Nationalist party, declared independence its aim, organised itself for action, took almost the whole nation minus a majority of the Mohammedans and a minority of the depressed classes into acceptance of its leadership and eventually formed the first national, though not as yet an independent, Government in India and secured from Britain acceptance of independence for India.³

At first Sri Aurobindo took part in Congress politics only from behind the scenes as he had not yet decided to leave the Baroda service; but he took long leave without pay in which, besides carrying on personally the secret revolutionary work, he attended the Barisal Conference broken up by the police and toured East Bengal along with Bepin Pal and associated himself closely with the forward group in the Congress. It was during this period that he joined Bepin Pal in the editing of the **Bande Mataram**, founded the new political party in Bengal and attended the Congress session at Calcutta at which the Extremists, though still a minority, succeeded under the leadership of Tilak in imposing part of their political programme on the Congress. The founding of the Bengal National College gave him the opportunity he needed and enabled him to resign his position in the Baroda service and join the college as its Principal. Subodh Mullick, one of Sri Aurobindo's collaborators in his secret action and afterwards also in Congress politics, in whose house he usually lived when he was in Calcutta, had given a lakh of rupees for this foundation and had stipulated that Sri Aurobindo should be given a post of professor in the college with a salary of Rs. 150; so he was now free to give his whole time to the service of the country. Bepin Pal, who had been long expounding a policy of self-help and non-cooperation in his weekly journal, now started a daily with the name of **Bande Mataram**, but it was likely to be a brief adventure since he began with only Rs. 500 in his pocket and no firm assurance of financial assistance in the future. He asked Sri Aurobindo to join him in this venture to which a ready consent was given, for now Sri Aurobindo saw his opportunity for starting the public propaganda necessary for his revolutionary purpose. He called a meeting of the forward group of young men in the Congress and [they] decided then

to organise themselves openly as a new political party joining hands with the corresponding group in Maharashtra under the proclaimed leadership of Tilak and to join battle with the Moderate party which was done at the Calcutta session. 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, whose direction Sri Aurobindo undertook during the absence of Bepin Pal who was sent on a tour in the districts to proclaim the purpose and programme of the new party. The new party was at once successful and the **Bande Mataram** paper began to circulate throughout India. On its staff were not only Bepin Pal and Sri Aurobindo but some other very able writers, Shyam Sundar Chakravarty, Hemendra Prasad Ghose and Bejoy Chatterji. Shyam Sundar and Bejoy were masters of the English language, each with a style of his own; Shyam Sundar caught up something like Sri Aurobindo's way of writing and later on many took his articles for Sri Aurobindo's. But after a time dissensions arose between Bepin Pal on one side and the other contributors and the directors of the Company because of temperamental incompatibility and differences of political view especially with regard to the secret revolutionary action with which others sympathised but to which Bepin Pal was opposed. This ended soon in Bepin Pal's separation from the journal. Sri Aurobindo would not have consented to this departure, for he regarded the qualities of Pal as a great asset to the **Bande Mataram**, since Pal, though not a man of action or capable of political leadership, was perhaps the best and most original political thinker in the country, an excellent writer and a magnificent orator: but the separation was effected behind Sri Aurobindo's back when he was convalescing from a dangerous attack of fever. His name was even announced without his consent in **Bande Mataram** as editor but for one day only, as he immediately put a stop to it since he was still formally in the Baroda service and in no way eager to have his name brought forward in public. Henceforward, however, he controlled the policy of the **Bande Mataram** along with that of the party in Bengal. Bepin Pal had stated the aim of the new party as complete self-government free from British control but this could have meant or at least included the Moderate aim of colonial self-government and Dadabhai Naoroji as President of the Calcutta session of the Congress had actually tried to capture the name of Swaraj, the Extremists' term for independence, for this colonial self-government. Sri Aurobindo's first preoccupation was to declare openly for complete and absolute independence as the aim of political action in India and to insist on this persistently in the pages of the journal; he was the first politician in India who had the courage to do this in public and he was immediately successful. The party took up the word Swaraj to express its own ideal of independence and it soon spread everywhere; but it was taken up as the ideal of the Congress much later on at the [Lahore]⁴ session of that body when it had been reconstituted and renovated under Nationalist leadership. The journal declared and developed a new political programme for the country as the programme of the Nationalist Party, non-cooperation, passive resistance, Swadeshi, Boycott, national education, settlement of disputes in law by popular arbitration and other items of Sri Aurobindo's plan. Sri Aurobindo published in the paper a series of articles on passive resistance, another developing a political philosophy of revolution and wrote many leaders aimed at destroying the shibboleths and superstitions of the Moderate Party, such as the belief in British justice and benefits bestowed by foreign government in India, faith in British law courts and in the adequacy of the education given in schools and universities in India 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. Assisted by this publicity the ideas of the Nationalists gained ground everywhere especially in the Punjab which had before been predominantly moderate. The **Bande Mataram** was almost unique in journalistic history in the influence it exercised in converting the mind of a people and preparing it for revolution. But its weakness was on the financial side; for the Extremists were still a poor man's party. So long as Sri Aurobindo was there in active control, he managed with great difficulty to secure sufficient public support for running the paper, but not for expanding it as he wanted, and when he was arrested and held in jail for a year, the economic situation of **Bande Mataram** became desperate: finally, it was decided that the journal should die a glorious death rather than perish by starvation and Bejoy Chatterji was commissioned to write an article for which the Government would certainly stop the publication of the paper. Sri Aurobindo had always taken care to give no handle in the editorial articles of the **Bande Mataram** either for a prosecution for sedition or any other drastic action fatal to its existence; an editor of **The Statesman** complained that the paper reeked with sedition patently visible between every line but it was so skilfully written that no legal action could be taken. The manoeuvre succeeded and the life of the **Bande Mataram** came to an end in Sri Aurobindo's absence.

The Nationalist programme could only achieve a partial beginning before it was temporarily broken by severe government repression. Its most important practical item was Swadeshi plus Boycott; for Swadeshi much was done to make the idea general and a few beginnings were made, but the greater results showed themselves only afterwards in the course of time. Sri Aurobindo was anxious that this part of the movement should be not only propagated in idea but given a practical organisation and an effective force. He wrote from Baroda asking whether it would not be possible to bring in the industrialists and manufacturers and gain the financial support of landed magnates and create an organisation in which men of industrial and commercial ability and experience and not politicians alone could direct operations and devise means of carrying out the policy; but he was told that it was impossible, the industrialists and the landed magnates were too timid to join in the movement, and the big commercial men were all interested in the import of British goods and therefore on the side of the status quo: so he had to abandon his idea of the organisation of Swadeshi and Boycott. Both Tilak and Sri Aurobindo were in favour of an effective boycott of British goods—but of British goods only; for there was little in the country to replace foreign articles: so they recommended the substitution for the British of foreign goods from Germany and Austria and America so that the fullest pressure might be brought upon England. They wanted the Boycott to be a political weapon and not merely an aid to Swadeshi; the total boycott of all foreign goods was an impracticable idea and the very limited application of it recommended in Congress resolutions was too small to be politically effective. 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. But the sudden

enthusiasm for the boycott of all foreign goods was wide and sweeping and the leaders had to conform to this popular cry and be content with the impulse it gave to the Swadeshi idea. National education was another item to which Sri Aurobindo attached much importance. He had been disgusted with the education given by the British system in the schools and colleges and universities, a system of which as a professor in the Baroda College he had full experience. He felt that it tended to dull and impoverish and tie up the naturally quick and brilliant and supple Indian intelligence, to teach it bad intellectual habits and spoil by narrow information and mechanical instruction its originality and productivity. The movement began well and many national schools were established in Bengal and many able men became teachers, but still the development was insufficient and the economical position of the schools precarious. Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up the movement personally and see whether it could not be given a greater expansion and a stronger foundation, but his departure from Bengal cut short this plan. In the repression and the general depression caused by it, most of the schools failed to survive. The idea lived on and it may be hoped that it will one day find an adequate form and body. The idea of people's courts was taken up and worked in some districts, not without success, but this too perished in the storm. 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 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 were 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.

After the **Bande Mataram** case, Sri Aurobindo became the recognised leader of Nationalism in Bengal. He led the party at the session of the [district]⁵ Conference at Midnapore where there was a vehement clash between the two parties. He now for the first time became a speaker on the public platform, addressed large meetings at Surat and presided over the Nationalist conference there. He stopped at several places on his way back to Calcutta and was the speaker at large meetings called to hear him.⁶ He led the party again at the session of the Provincial Conference at Hooghly. There it became evident for the first time that Nationalism was gaining the ascendant, for it commanded a majority among the delegates and in the Subjects Committee Sri Aurobindo was able to defeat the Moderates' resolution welcoming the Reforms and pass his own resolution stigmatising them as utterly inadequate and unreal and rejecting them. But the Moderate leaders threatened to secede if this was maintained and to avoid a scission he consented to allow the Moderate resolution to pass but spoke at the public session explaining his decision and asking the Nationalists to acquiesce in it in spite of their victory so as to keep some unity in the political forces of Bengal. The Nationalist delegates, at first triumphant and clamorous, accepted the decision and left the hall quietly at Sri Aurobindo's order so that they might not have to vote either for or against the Moderate resolution. This caused much amazement and discomfiture in the minds of the

Moderate leaders who complained that the people had refused to listen to their old and tried leaders and clamoured against them, but at the bidding of a young man new to politics they had obeyed in disciplined silence as if a single body. About this period Sri Aurobindo had decided to take up charge of a Bengali daily, **Nava Shakti**, and had moved from his rented house in Scott's Lane, where he had been living with his wife and sister, to rooms in the office of this newspaper, and there, before he could begin this new venture, early one morning while he was still sleeping, the police charged up the stairs, revolver in hand, and arrested him. He was taken to the police station and thence to Alipore Jail where he remained for a year during the magistrate's investigation and the trial in the Sessions Court at Alipore. At first he was lodged for some time in a solitary cell but afterwards transferred to a large section of the jail where he lived in one huge room with the other prisoners in the case; subsequently, after the assassination of the approver in the jail, all the prisoners were confined in contiguous but separate cells and met only in the court or in the daily exercise where they could not speak to each other. It was in the second period that Sri Aurobindo made the acquaintance of most of his fellow-accused. In the jail he spent almost all his time in reading the Gita and the Upanishads and in intensive meditation and the practice of Yoga. This he pursued even in the second interval when he had no opportunity of being alone and had to accustom himself to meditation amid general talk and laughter, the playing of games and much noise and disturbance; in the first and third periods he had full opportunity and used it to the full. In the Sessions Court the accused were confined in a large prisoners' cage and here during the whole day he remained absorbed in his meditation attending little to the trial and hardly listening to the evidence. C. R. Das, one of his Nationalist collaborators and a famous lawyer, had put aside his large practice and devoted himself for months to the defence of Sri Aurobindo who left the case entirely to him and troubled no more about it; for he had been assured from within and knew that he would be acquitted. During this period his view of life was radically changed; he had taken up Yoga with the original idea of acquiring spiritual force and energy and divine guidance for his work in life. But now the inner spiritual life and realisation which had continually been increasing in magnitude and universality and assuming a larger place took him up entirely and his work became a part and result of it and besides far exceeded the service and liberation of the country and fixed itself in an aim, previously only glimpsed, which was world-wide in its bearing and concerned with the whole future of humanity.

When he came out from jail, Sri Aurobindo found the whole political aspect of the country altered; most of the Nationalist leaders were in jail or in self-imposed exile and there was a general discouragement and depression, though the feeling in the country had not ceased but was only suppressed and was growing by its suppression. He determined to continue the struggle; he held weekly meetings in Calcutta, but the attendance which had numbered formerly thousands full of enthusiasm was now only of hundreds and had no longer the same force and life. He also went to places in the districts to speak and at one of these delivered his speech at Uttarpara in which for the first time he spoke publicly of his Yoga and his spiritual experiences. He started also two weeklies, one in English and one in Bengali, the **Karmayogin** and **Dharma**, which had a fairly large circulation and were, unlike the **Bande Mataram**, easily self-supporting. He attended and spoke at the Provincial Conference at [Hooghly]⁷ in 1909: for in Bengal owing to the compromise at [Pabna]⁸ the two parties had not split altogether apart and both joined in the Conference, though there could be no

representatives of the Nationalist party at the meeting of the Central Moderate Body which had taken the place of the Congress. Surendra Nath Banerji had indeed called a private conference attended by Sri Aurobindo and one or two other leaders of the Nationalists to discuss a project of uniting the two parties at the session in [Lahore]⁹ and giving a joint fight to the dominant right wing of the Moderates; for he had always dreamt of becoming again the leader of a united Bengal with the Extremist party as his strong right arm: but that would have necessitated the Nationalists being appointed as delegates by the Bengal Moderates and accepting the constitution imposed at Surat. This Sri Aurobindo refused to do; he demanded a change in that constitution enabling newly formed associations to elect delegates so that the Nationalists might independently send their representatives to the All-India session and on this point the negotiations broke down. Sri Aurobindo began however to consider how to revive the national movement under the changed circumstances. He glanced at the possibility of falling back on a Home Rule movement which the Government could not repress, but this, which was actually realised by Mrs. Besant later on, would have meant a postponement and a falling back from the ideal of independence. He looked also at the possibility of an intense and organised passive resistance movement in the manner afterwards adopted by Gandhi. He saw however that he himself could not be the leader of such a movement.

At no time did he consent to have anything to do with the sham Reforms which were all the Government at that period cared to offer. He held up always the slogan of "no compromise" or, as he now put it in his Open Letter to his countrymen published in the **Karmayogin**, "no co-operation without control". It was only if real political, administrative and financial control were given to popular ministers in an elected Assembly that he would have anything to do with offers from the British Government. Of this he saw no sign until the proposal of the Montagu Reforms in which first something of the kind seemed to appear. He foresaw that the British Government would have to begin trying to meet the national aspiration half-way, but he would not anticipate that moment before it actually came. The Montagu Reforms came nine years after Sri Aurobindo had retired to Pondicherry and by that time he had abandoned all outward and public political activity in order to devote himself to his spiritual work, acting only by his spiritual force on the movement in India, until his prevision of real negotiations between the British Government and the Indian leaders was fulfilled by the Cripps' proposal and the events that came after.

Meanwhile the Government were determined to get rid of Sri Aurobindo as the only considerable obstacle left to the success of their repressive policy. As they could not send him to the Andamans they decided to deport him. This came to the knowledge of Sister Nivedita and she informed Sri Aurobindo and asked him to leave British India and work from outside so that his work would not be stopped or totally interrupted. Sri Aurobindo contented himself with publishing in the **Karmayogin** a signed article in which he spoke of the project of deportation and left the country what he called his last will and testament; he felt sure that this would kill the idea of deportation and in fact it so turned out. Deportation left aside, the Government could only wait for some opportunity for prosecution for sedition and this chance came to them when Sri Aurobindo published in the same paper another signed article reviewing the political situation. The article was sufficiently moderate in its tone and later on the High Court refused to regard it as seditious and acquitted the printer. Sri Aurobindo one night 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. He obeyed the command at once, for it was now his rule to move only as he was moved by the divine guidance and never to resist and depart from it; he did not stay to consult with anyone but in ten minutes was at the river ghat and in a boat plying on the Ganges, in a few hours he was at Chandernagore where he went into secret residence. He sent a message to Sister Nivedita asking her to take up the editing of the **Karmayogin** in his absence. This was the end of his active connection with his two journals. At Chandernagore he plunged entirely into solitary meditation and ceased all other activity. Then there came to him a call to proceed to Pondicherry. A boat manned by some young revolutionaries of Uttarpara took him to Calcutta; there he boarded the **Dupleix** and reached Pondicherry on April 4, 1910.

At Pondicherry, from this time onwards Sri Aurobindo's practice of Yoga became more and more absorbing. He dropped all participation in any public political activity, refused more than one request to preside at sessions of the restored Indian National Congress and made a rule of abstention from any public utterance of any kind not connected with his spiritual activities or any contribution of writings or articles except what he wrote afterwards in the **Arya**. For some years he kept up some private communication with the revolutionary forces he had led through one or two individuals, but this also he dropped after a time and his abstention from any kind of participation in politics became complete. As his vision of the future grew clearer, he saw that the eventual independence of India was assured by the march of Forces of which he became aware, that Britain would be compelled by the pressure of Indian resistance and by the pressure of international events to concede independence and that she was already moving towards that eventuality with whatever opposition and reluctance. He felt that there would be no need of armed insurrection and that the secret preparation for it could be dropped without injury to the nationalist cause, although the revolutionary spirit had to be maintained and would be maintained intact. His own personal intervention in politics would therefore be no longer indispensable. Apart from all this, the magnitude of the spiritual work set before him became more and more clear to him, and he saw that the concentration of all his energies on it was necessary. Accordingly, when the Ashram came into existence, he kept it free from all political connections or action; even when he intervened in politics twice afterwards on special occasions, this intervention was purely personal and the Ashram was not concerned in it. The British Government and numbers of people besides could not believe that Sri Aurobindo had ceased from all political action and it was supposed by them that he was secretly participating in revolutionary activities and even creating a secret organisation in the security of French India. But all this was pure imagination and rumour and there was nothing of the kind. His retirement from political activity was complete, just as was his personal retirement into solitude in 1910.

But this did not mean, as most people supposed, that he had retired into some height of spiritual experience devoid of any further interest in the world or in the fate of India. It could not mean that, for the very principle of his Yoga was not only to realise the Divine and attain to a complete spiritual consciousness, but also to take all life and all world activity into the scope of this spiritual consciousness and action and to base life on the Spirit and give it a spiritual meaning. 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; for it is part of the experience of those who have advanced far in Yoga that besides the ordinary forces and activities of the mind and life and body in Matter, there are other forces and powers that can act and do act from behind and from above; there is also a spiritual dynamic power which can be possessed by those who are advanced in the spiritual consciousness, though all do not care to possess or, possessing, to use it, and this power is greater than any other and more effective. It was this force which, as soon as he had attained to it, he used, at first only in a limited field of personal work, but afterwards in a constant action upon the world forces. He had no reason to be dissatisfied with the results or to feel the necessity of any other kind of 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. At the beginning he did not actively concern himself with it, but 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 when everybody was expecting the immediate fall of England and the definite triumph of Hitler, and he had the satisfaction of seeing the rush of German victory almost immediately arrested and 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 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 allowed certain letters he had written in support of the war affirming his views of the Asuric nature and inevitable outcome of Hitlerism to become public. 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, which had till then swept everything before it, changed 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.

1.1. Conclusion

In conclusion, Sri Aurobindo's political life cannot be separated from his spiritual vision. He transformed the meaning of nationalism by infusing it with ethical and divine purpose. His legacy endures not merely in the political history of India, but in the larger philosophical narrative of human freedom and progress. He remains a symbol of the unity between action and ideal, patriotism and spirituality a visionary who gave the Indian freedom movement its soul.

Foot Notes

1. 1948 edition Barisal. See Table 1, page 566.—Ed. 
2. 1948 edition Benares. See Table 1, page 566.—Ed. 
3. 1948 edition Bengal Provincial. See Table 1, page 565.—Ed. 
4. 1948 edition Hooghly. See Table 1, page 566.—Ed. 
5. 1948 edition Karachi. See Table 1, page 565.—Ed. 
6. 1948 edition seven. See Table 1, page 565.—Ed. 
7. Aurobindo. World Lit Written Engl. 1990;30(1):56-71.
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18. See Table 2, page 568.—Ed. 
19. Singh MP, Roy H. Indian political thought: themes and thinkers. 2011.
20. Sri Aurobindo Ashram eBooks; 1953.
21. *This and the preceding paragraph were inserted here when this note was first published in 1948. They incorporate, with some changes, most of a previously written note published on pages 72-73.*—Ed. 
22. *This sentence, unlike the final one in this "General Note" (see page 66), was not revised before publication in 1948.*—Ed. 
23. Tripathi A. Swadhinata Sangrame Bharater Jatiya Congress (1885-1947). 1990.
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