

*The Social-Political Thought
of Sri Aurobindo*

[Ph.D. Revised Dissertation thesis for the Award of Doctor of Philosophy]

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*The Social-Political Thought of
Sri Aurobindo*



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“The Social-Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo” submitted by me for the Award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Arts at Jadavpur University is based upon my work carried out under the supervision of Prof. Indrani Sanyal.

And that this thesis is a revised version of the one submitted on 08.07.2016. It is certified that neither this thesis nor any part of it has been submitted before for any degree or diploma anywhere/elsewhere.

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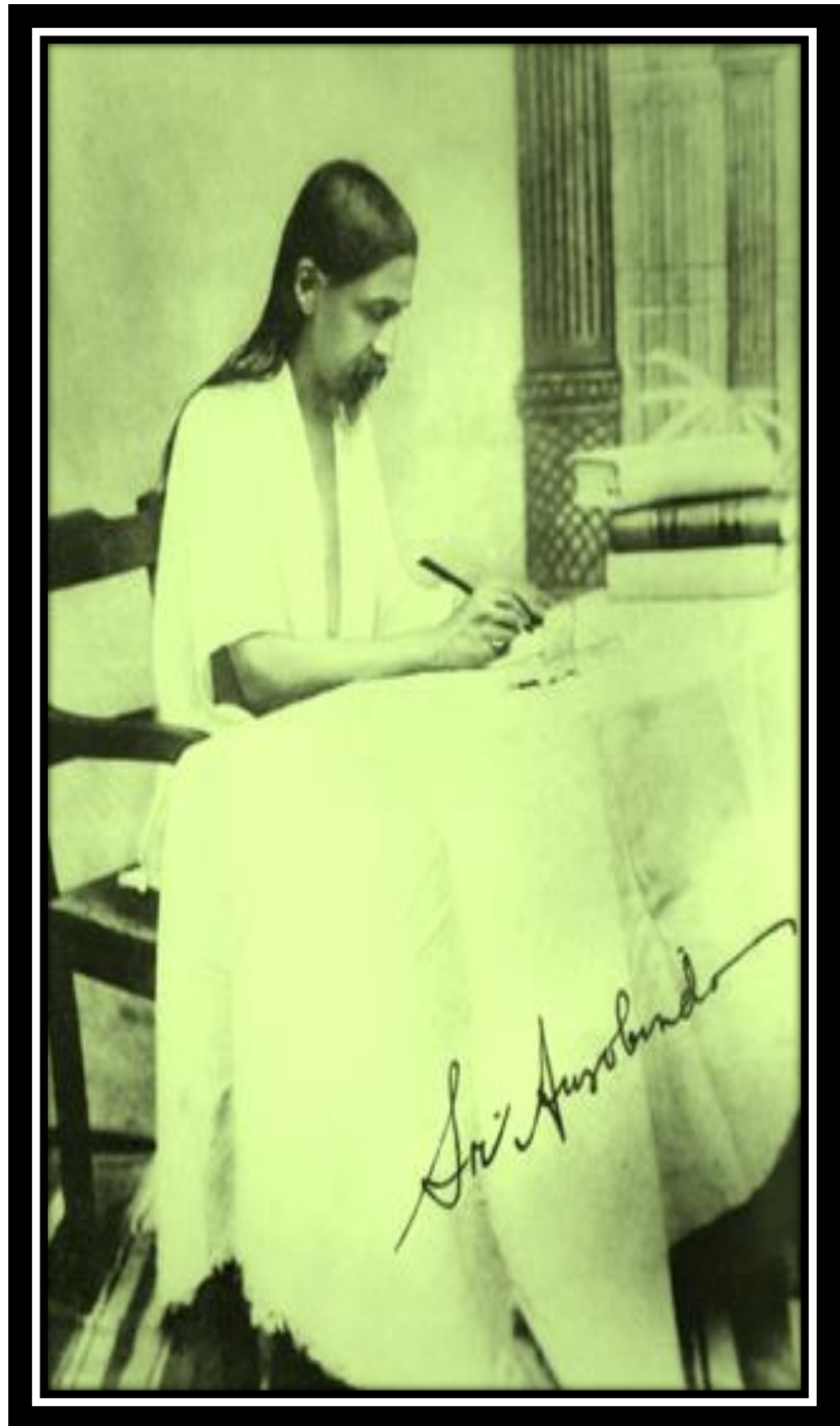
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Preface

When I got admission in my Post-graduate class at Jadavpur University in 2004 then *Life Divine* of Sri Aurobindo was mandatory to read in our course study. While going through that book I felt quite attracted to the beauty of Sri Aurobindo's writings and decided to go on further reading on him. The spiritual bent of his mind even being one of the famous political leaders of Indian National Congress evoke astonishment in me. In 1905 Aurobindo Ghose was very popular nationalist leader of Indian national Congress just like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai and Bipin Chandra Pal. But he left his promising political career at the peak time of 1910 and went on living in first Chandernagore and then at Pondicherry. He was thought, by the critics, to be retired from his political career at 1910 even though he was quite aware about the ongoing political situations arisen in India and world till his death in 1950. Actually, due to the spiritual bent of mind, he believed that his engagement in Indian political movement is also due to the divine plan. In his book *Life Divine* the spiritual outlook was thoroughly revealed. However when I went through his other books like *The Foundations of Indian Culture*, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, *The Human Cycle*, *Bande Mataram* then there is no room left for me to misapprehend the profound knowledge of Sri Aurobindo on every arena of Indian as well as World politics.

I tried to make my Ph.D. thesis on his social-political thought. It will be easy if I just go on discussing the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought by

citing his contribution while finding out the similarity and dissimilarity with other contemporary Indian thinkers e.g. Rabindranath Tagore, M.K. Gandhi, Bankim Chandra, Swami Vivekananda and also with that of Western thinkers, like Marx, Darwin etc. But I chose the complicated path of discovering several social-political tools used by the colonized subjects of the then India and their implications as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.

In this dissertation I have gone through Sri Aurobindo's several social-political topics viz. *swaraj*, boycott, resistance, national education, village reconstruction which ended with my search for Life Divine. When we go through Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought we cannot leave these topics aside. As a political leader and social reformer he in his social-political thought praised all of them and therefore I tried hard to discover their relevance. The result is mesmerizing which has been discussed elaborately in my conclusion. In this endeavor whether I am successful or not I do not know. I only know that in fact I am performing my duty as following the *Gita*:

karmaṇyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana

mā karmaphalāhetubhūr mā te saṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi ||2/47||

Introduction

Many Western critics during the colonial period discovered the absence of political awareness among Indians and they presumed that accounted for all the failures of India in the domain of economics and politics. These objections of the critics are based on the popular misconceptions regarding Indian history, culture and politics. In the present dissertation entitled ‘The Social- political Thought of Sri Aurobindo’ our objective is to bring to light major aspects of Sri Aurobindo’s thought on the matter. I would also like to elaborate the views of Sri Aurobindo to combat all such objections.

To provide a proper understanding about Sri Aurobindo’s idea of politics we need to examine his ideas and their implications meticulously without any preconceived bias. In the present century to speak about politics and spiritualism in the same breath would undoubtedly sound most ridiculous and absurd. It is hard to believe that politics and spirituality can ever have any sort of inter-relatedness. But in the view of Sri Aurobindo, politics remains instrumental for bringing the destined spiritual freedom of India. He declared that India should gain its past spiritual mastery lacked by several materialistic nations like Europe.¹ Hence for the attainment of spiritual liberty of India, securing its political freedom seemed indispensable to Sri Aurobindo.

¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Swaraj and the Coming Anarchy”, p. 731

However, in spite of the inherent spiritual overtone in his social-political thought I would like to argue for establishing Sri Aurobindo's viewpoint among the most relevant ones. Sri Aurobindo did not provide any thoroughly worked out model for social-political philosophy. Nor any such attempt would be made to develop a full-fledged political and social theory out of Sri Aurobindo's writings. In the present dissertation I would pick up some of the political tools that were frequently used by the colonized subjects and try to explore how such practices were viewed by Sri Aurobindo in the light of certain normative presuppositions. The vision of a better polity was closely tied up with the idea of a better society with well-educated and morally enlightened citizens with unity of hearts. This discussion may be viewed as an attempt to establish a link between the hardcore social-political and the supposedly esoteric spiritual following Sri Aurobindo. Is there ultimately any conflict at all between these two domains – political and spiritual – is another question that I would like to touch upon in my dissertation.

The discovery of the true nature of a multi-communal country like India is not an easy task. The question of national unity of India is often understood as the form of religious unity, most probably, due to India's deep faith on religion. Sri Aurobindo himself conceived that all great awakenings of India actually depended upon the religious awakening of it.² This religious awakening preached by Sri Aurobindo was interpreted by some interpreters, like Peter Heehs and Romila Thapar, as religious nationalism or Hindu revivalism. Romila Thapar described the nationalism

² Sri Aurobindo, *On Nationalism*, p. 72

preached by Sri Aurobindo as Hindu revivalism while Peter Heehs called it as religious nationalism. From the writings of Sri Aurobindo we would find out that he never considered one religion to be superior to the other, be it Hinduism or Islam. He actually accepted the goodness of all religions.³ Hence it is certainly a misconception that his kind of nationalism is to be characterized as religious nationalism. Nor his nationalism is to be viewed as Hindu revivalism for the same reason. From here he later derived the idea of nation-soul which should be completely free from any artificial external groupings like religion or politics.

Sri Aurobindo's reflections on human communities has corresponding thesis regarding human mental potentialities. A nation cannot grow if it does not get fair opportunity to grow from outward and also from inward. For this inward growth we need to develop the individual mind as the basis of any nation. Hence for the attainment of national unity we need to identify the role of individuals within a nation. The individual development is dependent on its cooperation with other individuals and in the similar way a community of the nation can grow only when we seek for its cooperation with other nations. Man seeks both freedom and unity for the ultimate development of him. The whole human history centers on these two significant ideas of human life. The process of perfecting the imperfect human society advocated by Sri Aurobindo in this way depends on seeking of these two ideas namely unity and freedom for the psychological development of mankind.

³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, "The Ideal of the Karmayogin", p. 5

The concept of unity in the context of Aurobindian social-political thought has very crucial role to play. The subjective secret of an individual life lies in its identification of himself as *Brahman*. With reason we cannot grasp this idea. Man's intelligence or reasoning faculty has certain limits and with limitation we cannot understand the unlimited *Brahman*. Self-consciousness, popularly known as *bodhi*, is the way to achieve this union.⁴ On the basis of this proper subjective development of individual a national unity can emerge. Uniformity of nations will be external and loose in nature, assembled to have economical and political advantages; while unity among nations depends on the proper subjective development of its individuals. A nation can be united both outwardly and inwardly but for the proper development of a nation we need to approach the inward urge of unification. Sri Aurobindo in this context accepted the notion of centripetal unity or deeper psychological unity among nations based on the proper subjective development of its individuals.⁵ And for achieving this unity among individuals we undoubtedly need to preach for the value of freedom as for having psychological unity with others the individual should enjoy some amount of freedom.

In the first chapter I would discuss the importance of *swaraj* theory in Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought. *Swaraj*, according to *Arthashastra* written by Kautilya in ancient India, stands for autocracy or *swarajya* rather than democracy or *gaṇarājya*. It was thought that *swarajya* or *swaraj*, in the modern Indian political scenario, first took the shape of democracy in the thoughts of Bal Gangadhar Tilak.

⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "The Powers of the Mind", p. 25

⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, 'Nation and Empire: Real and Political Unities', p. 36

However *swaraj* was interpreted as democracy by most Indian political thinkers of that time, namely Bipin Chandra Pal, Sri Aurobindo and later M.K. Gandhi. In Sri Aurobindo's thought, *swaraj* stands for two senses – complete independence in the political sense and *mukti* or liberation in the spiritual sense. However he drew the similarity of the concept of *swaraj* with *sanatana dharma*, thought to be similar with the Universal religion thesis advocated by Swami Vivekananda by critics. I would discuss elaborately all these notions in my first chapter and try to prove it, in the views of Sri Aurobindo, the first step towards our advancement to internationalism.

In the second chapter I would focus on the role of boycott as the essential corollary of Indian politics. Boycott is the mere political form of passive resistance and it aims at the refusal of the unjust coercive laws passively instead of indulging into direct active revolt. I would go through the history of boycott movement of India at that time in brief in this regard. Boycott, as a political concept, has five different aspects according to Sri Aurobindo, i.e. administrative or executive boycott, economic boycott, judicial or legislative boycott, educational boycott and social boycott. There is a controversy between Gandhi and Aurobindo in the context of accepting boycott. However I would show in my chapter that Aurobindian thesis of boycott, a political concept, actually serves as the gateway of attaining *swaraj*. The term 'boycott' has inherent spiritual overtone hidden behind it which would also be discussed in this chapter.

In the third chapter I would concentrate on the role played by Aurobindian thesis of resistance, be it passive or active in nature. The history of resistance movement of

India at that time would be discussed briefly in this regard. Active resistance is falsely thought to be similar with armed revolt while in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo they are clearly different from each other. Gandhiji's passive resistance theory is compared with *Satyagraha* and for understanding Sri Aurobindo's concept of passive resistance I would draw a comparison between both of their theories. While in the context of active resistance their difference is quite clear. Gandhiji, unlike Sri Aurobindo, was never in favor of using active resistance. In this third chapter of my dissertation, I would show resistance, another political concept used by Sri Aurobindo, also has some hidden spiritual overtone.

In the fourth chapter I would like to discuss the role played by national education on individual. It is a social concept as it has a social impact upon individuals. Education serves as a means of educating the society as well as the individual. For understanding the social background of Aurobindian national education thesis we have to go through the political backdrop of India at that time. Sri Aurobindo derived his unique thesis on national education as a critique of Gopalkrishna Gokhale's model of national education as the independent system of education. His theory of national education is not limited within the boundary of nationalism but enters into the vast arena of internationalism. The five types of integral education theory of Sri Aurobindo also help us to be educated in such a way so that we can understand the importance of human life. The educational doctrine of Sri Aurobindo is known as the doctrine of integral education as it aims at the integration of body, life, mind, psyche and soul-factor of a pupil. Sri Aurobindo's

integral education also helps us to go towards Life Divine for all living beings in the universe.

In the fifth chapter I would concentrate in developing Sri Aurobindo's ideas of village reconstruction. It is a social concept which is not very elaborately discussed by him. Here we would focus upon Sri Aurobindo's reasoning behind the idea of *gram swaraj*. Man, as a social being, is a member of his village and also of his nation. Villages are the core of a nation hence gaining political freedom for all people living in the same village helps us to attain the same for all people of the nation. I would like to discuss here the process of village reconstruction following Sri Aurobindo. The inherent spiritual aspect of this social concept also would be discussed.

In the sixth chapter I would try to find out the ways towards Life Divine, the road of achieving Kingdom of Heaven, for all. Here I must clarify how this Life Divine which, according to Sri Aurobindo, may be attained via the five historical stages, i.e. the symbolic stage, the typical stage, the conventional stage, the individualistic stage and the subjective stage, is not at all a metaphysical concept. It is actually dealt by me as a social concept as through these five social stages, following Sri Aurobindo, we can go towards the path of attaining Life Divine. Sri Aurobindo, as an anti-positivist, discovered the role of psychological factor behind the historical changes. Hence these five social stages are related with three psychological stages of human mind; namely infra-rational, rational and supra-rational. The five social stages of Sri Aurobindo also point out that in the subjective stage if we can

comprehend our divine union with *Brahman* then actually it will open up all the possibilities to reach Life Divine.

In my conclusion of this dissertation I would try to focus on my findings regarding the nature of his social-political thesis. Sri Aurobindo while discussing his view regarding political freedom, in this context of social-political thought, does not detach it from its hidden spiritual touch. Here I would specially mention about the spiritual overtone hidden behind Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought. In this concluding chapter I would try to discover the relevance of his social-political thought and the way to reach towards internationalism through the five social stages as following Sri Aurobindo. My reason for describing the Aurobindian thesis of nationalism as spiritual nationalism would be discussed elaborately here.



First chapter

The Swaraj

In Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought *swaraj*⁶ is an important topic to begin with. Apparently the plain and simple word 'swaraj' has deeper significance and in the context of Indian social-political and cultural history it has far-reaching implications. In the context of Sri Aurobindo's social and political thought the word 'swaraj' has also received various interpretations. Some of the critics often have interpreted Sri Aurobindo as a great *yogi*, profound mystic as well as an exceptional philosopher. Naturally from their perspective when the idea of *swaraj* has been interpreted it has been loaded with metaphysical, spiritual as well as mystical overtones. It is thought by some interpreters that *swaraj* signifies the starting-point of an individual's inward journey towards the aspiring union with the Divine. The actual purpose of Sri Aurobindo, to them, is to make our life the Life Divine so that we can realize the inherent divinity within us. No doubt, in their opinion, Sri Aurobindo's main goal is somewhat spiritual in nature and politics remains definitely as one of its significant corollaries. However, in order to arrive at a true

⁶ According to the standard interpretation the term 'swaraj' is uttered as *svarāj* by most. But as I am following Sri Aurobindo so I am using the term with the same spelling made by him i.e. *swaraj*.

description of Sri Aurobindo's idea about politics we need to examine his ideas and their implications more meticulously without any preconceived bias.

If we think from the political aspect then we will discover that Sri Aurobindo's aim is to help in building up India for the sake of humanity – this he viewed as the spirit of nationalism which would show us the path of universal humanity. The idea of universal humanity as preached by Sri Aurobindo also requires to be clearly deciphered. In the present modern century to speak about politics and spiritualism in the same breath would undoubtedly sound most ridiculous. It is hard to believe that politics and spirituality can ever share any sort of inter-connection. We could deduce that in Sri Aurobindo's social-political philosophy *swaraj* seems to be the symbol of political freedom. In his view, politics remains instrumental for bringing the destined spiritual freedom of India. He declared that India should gain its past spiritual mastery lacked by several materialistic nations like Europe.⁷ This 'destined freedom and greatness' of India is nothing but spiritual in nature.⁸ Indian spirituality is the touch-stone by whose help the materialistic attitude of the Western nations can be transformed into the spiritualistic one. But for achieving spiritual freedom, India must at first of all gain its political liberty. Because no nation existing in the realm of political servitude, can be able to attain the spiritual salvation as dreamt by Sri Aurobindo. Hence for the fulfillment of Sri Aurobindo's aim of gaining spiritual liberty of India, our urge for attaining its political freedom is indispensable. His

⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Swaraj and the Coming Anarchy", p. 731

⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, "The Ideal of the Karmayogin", p. 6

theory of *swaraj*, in this context, can become inseparable with the notion of political freedom.

A. Etymological Meaning of Swaraj:

In the etymological sense, ‘*swa*’ stands for ‘self’ and ‘*raj*’ stands for ‘rule’. Hence the term ‘*swaraj*’ literally may be taken to signify self-rule. But this type of oversimplification is really harmful in consequence. We have to understand first the inherent meaning of ‘*swa*’ or ‘self’. The word ‘*swa*’ or ‘self’ seems to have two senses accordingly as it is taken to stand for individual or group. Hence ‘*swa*’ means –

1. One man
2. One group

Hence ‘self-rule’ or ‘*swaraj*’ seems to stand for two meanings or connotations:

1. The rule by a man i.e. autocracy
2. The rule by a group i.e. democracy

Then what is *swaraj*? Is it autocracy or democracy? Now, for understanding it, let us try to comprehend the meaning of *swaraj* as found in Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* and in the writings of Tilak and Gandhi.

B. Swaraj: in Kautilya’s Arthashastra:

In Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* we get the descriptions of several types of state concepts, namely *svarājya* (*swarajya*), *dvairājya*, *vairājya* and *ganarājya*. The leader of *swarajya* is called as *svarāt* (*swarat*) or the sovereign king. The *Nichya* and *Apachya* states of Western India are cited as the proper instances of *svarājya*.

Nichya is the place near Indus River while *Apachya* is somewhere above *Nichya*.⁹ The *svarāts* are considered as sovereign and self-sufficient rulers of these *svarājyas*. *Svarājya* is compared with a kind of aristocracy as the ruler is nominated from other aristocrat members of the nation. *Dvairājya* of the Sixth and Seventh centuries, is the rule of two similarly powerful rulers over one state. *Lichhabi* and *Thakuri* are two significant *dvairājyas* of ancient India. The two separate rulers could even make two different injunctions in the same project regarding the welfare of the nation. In the *Inscription of Kathmandu* we get its true proofs. In Nepal this *dvairājya* rule lasted for long times than other Indian territories. This state is neither similar with democracy nor with aristocracy. Form the *Mahabharata* we get to know that in the popular province named Avanti, two rulers or *dwirats*, namely Binda and Anubinda ruled for sometimes.¹⁰ Both *svarājya* (*swarajya*) and *dvairājya* are the proper examples of the monarchies. *Vairājya* can be called as a kind of *bureaucracy*, as sometimes here bureaucrats or *amātyas* ruled on behalf of the monarch over the state. There remains immense possibility of tyrannical rule as the supreme administrative power is nested upon the shoulder of the bureaucrats on the behalf of the monarch. However *vairājya* is said to be the ancestor nation to that of the *gaṇarājya*. *Vairājya* is the states situated at the Northern side of India, e.g. Uttarkuru, Uttarmadra etc. The ruler of such country is known as *virāts*. However such king is well-popular among his people than *svarāts* or *dvirāts*, as he is known as the sovereign king. Such king has to follow the opinions of his subordinate

⁹ Bhaduri, N.P., *Dandaniti: Pracin Bharatiya Rajasashtra*, p. 82

¹⁰ Ibid, p. 82

people. Hence the common masses living under the territory of *vairājya* and ruled by the *virāt* kings lived very happily. K.P. Jayswal called *vairājya* as the first proper instance of the 'Kingless constitution'.¹¹ These states are thought to be the true examples of republics or republican states. However the *gaṇarājya* is best among all other states. When the common masses, being fed up with the rule of the *virats* or his faithful bureaucrats, withdraw the administrative power in their own hands, then *gaṇarājya* is formed. According to U. Ghoshal, the political significance of the word 'gaṇa' first used as non-monarchical or republican community by Jayaswal.¹² But actually the word 'gaṇa' is commonly used in the sense of democracy. The word 'gaṇarājya' is made up of two different parts – 'gaṇa' i.e. democracy lead by common people and 'rājya' i.e. state. In this above way etymologically *ganarajya* stands for nothing else but 'democratic state'. *Gaṇarājya* is often synonymously used as *gaṇasamgha*. *Gaṇasamgha* is, according to R.C. Majumdar, a definite organization bound by laws and regulations following Panini. He made difference between the two senses of the word 'gaṇa' as democracy following Kautilya and as autonomous tribe following *Mahabharata*.¹³ D. R. Bhandarkar said that *gaṇasamgha* has to be a corporate body of individuals formed for attaining a definite object which object can be political in nature.¹⁴ In his view, *gaṇasamgha* is a form of republic. Jayaswal too indicated *gaṇasamgha* as another example of the

¹¹ As found in Bhaduri, N.P., *Dandaniti: Pracin Bharatiya Rajasashtra*, p. 84

¹² Ghoshal, U., *A History of Hindu Political Theories: From the earliest times to the first quarter of the Seventeenth Century A.D.*, p. 204 (footnote)

¹³ Majumdar, R.C., *Corporate Life in Ancient India*, p. 107

¹⁴ Bahandarkar, D.R., *Lectures on the Ancient History of India: On the Period from 650 to 325 B.C.*, p. 87

republican state, but it is more akin to democracy or democratic state than the republican one.¹⁵ *Samgha* is described as ‘martial clans’ by R.P. Kangle as – ‘It may be assumed that the constitution of the Samgha was able to install a feeling of solidarity among the confederating units. The presence of a number of chiefs on the ruling council also prevented any sudden shift of policy, such as is likely to be the case with a single ruler, whose actions may be swayed by his personal whims.’¹⁶ But ordinarily *samgha* is known to be a guild; hence *gaṇasamgha* could stand for democratic guild-system. In this way it can be concluded that *gaṇarājya* and *gaṇasamgha* are not completely synonymous in nature.

In Kautilya’s *Arthashastra* *swaraj* (*svāraj*) stands for the symbol of autocratic state or *swarajya* ruled by one autocratic ruler or monarch; and *gaṇarājya* stands for the democratic government governed by an independent group. But in modern times *swaraj* stands for *gaṇarājya* i.e. the democratic government governed by an independent group. Now in its explanation we can mention that the word ‘*swa*’ (*sva*) could stand for one man and also for one group. Hence *swaraj* can turn out to be the rule of one ruler (autocracy) or one group (democracy). Among these two senses the first sense of the word *swaraj* is applied by Kautilya where the entire nation is ruled by an autocratic ruler. However we cannot take the word *swaraj* in the same sense as employed by Kautilya. We have to take it in the second sense. In

¹⁵ Bhaduri, N.P., *Dandaniti: Pracin Bharatiya Rajasashtra*, p. 85

¹⁶ Kangle, R.P., *Kautiliya Arthashastra*, Vol. III, p. 125

this sense *swaraj* becomes closer to democracy rather than autocracy as interpreted by Kautilya.

From the modern point of view we may at least try to co-relate the two separate notions as of *swaraj* (*svāraj*) and *gaṇarājya*. To make our position clear we may undertake *swaraj* in the sense of political liberty instead of autocracy as depicted by Kautilya. *Gaṇarājya* mainly aims at maintaining the kingdom as per the command of common people or *gaṇa*. It is quite similar in nature with democracy. In a democratic state the administration has no ruling power over its statesmen; instead it has to follow their commands. A democratic state needs to have *swaraj* or political independence for the sake of its own existence. It has to be self-sufficient, self-independent, self-governed and self-satisfied in its social and political arena. Thus understood, it has to fulfill its political cry for *swaraj* and for this reason *gaṇarājya* is known to be that state which can easily fulfill the need of *swaraj*. But one thing we should remember is that here *swaraj* connotes the sense of political freedom.

C. Swaraj as interpreted by B.G. Tilak:

Swaraj was thought to be the first call of Shivaji Maharaja at the time of Maratha (also called as Marhatta by Sri Aurobindo) upheaval against the Muslim invasion at the time of Aurangzeb. It was called then as *swarajya* (own kingdom or dominion) by him. To Shivaji *swaraj* stood for acquiring our own kingdom or *swarajya*. After that this cry for *swarajya* was taken by Bal Gangadhar Tilak. Tilak in his books *The Orion*, 1893 and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, 1903 proved the excellence of

Aryan tradition citing from the Vedic hymns. In the book named *The Orion* he described the *Vedas* as the oldest book concerning the beginning of Aryan civilization.¹⁷ The Aryans, as envisioned by him, were actually Indians; not intruders from outside.¹⁸ He believed tremendously in the ancient glory of Indian culture. So it is not astonishing that he would follow the view of Shivaji in the context of describing the inner sense of the word *swarajya*.

However Tilak's theory of *swarajya* took a different shape as self-rule from Shivaji.¹⁹ Gandhian *swaraj* is also used in the similar sense of self-rule, but the self-rule accepted by B.G. Tilak is different from Gandhian thesis of self-rule. Tilak's self-rule was political self-rule while Gandhian self-rule was mainly individual self-rule dependent upon the utilization of truth (*satya*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*). It would not be inappropriate to claim that in Tilak's hand *swaraj* or *swarajya* took the shape of democracy. However the aim of his democracy is an ideal one where all men can reside without any distinctions. This higher kind of democracy accepted by Tilak is akin to the Kingdom of God predicted by Gandhi and the Kingdom of Heaven predicted by Sri Aurobindo.

In the political theory of Tilak equality, liberty, justice etc all the natural rights find their origin in one term called *swarajya*, which has its foundation in the *Vedanta* philosophy. Due to the existence of equality, liberty and justice factors behind his

¹⁷ Tilak, B.G., *The Orion or the Antiquity of the Vedas*, p. 1

¹⁸ Wolpert, A.S., *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reforms in the Making of Modern India*, p. 64-65

¹⁹ Heehs, Peter, *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History*, p. 3

theory of *swarajya* we interpret it as democracy. Tilak was thus interpreted as the first advocate of democracy in the sense of *swarajya* in the context of Indian freedom movement. However the truth is that most Nationalist leaders, like Bipin Chandra Pal, Sri Aurobindo etc took *swarajya* or *swaraj* in the sense of democracy. By the way Tilak's *swarajya* concept is bigger idea than democracy. According to him, all living and non-living souls have the same soul or *ātman* which is the manifestation of the Divine. In this context we can discover similarity of his theory with that of Sri Aurobindo. Tilak wrote several articles on *swarajya* at the time of Indian political movement that helped him to develop his theory of *swaraj* as political self-rule.²⁰ In the article "Swarajya Ani Swarajya" (Self-rule and Good rule) written in April 1907, he even evaluated the causes behind the downfall of the *Peshwa* rule in Maharashtra as it gave much emphasis over the centralization of power in the name of enforcing good rule instead of ensuring self-rule. These were the reasons for which Tilak considered *swaraj* as none the less but political self-rule.

At the time of Indian independence movement B.G. Tilak declared that we all have the natural birth-right to have *swarajya* (*swaraj* is our birth-right). His *swarajya* or political self-rule had been connoted as complete independence at the time of his involvements in Indian political movement. But we can say that Tilak's theory of *swarajya* as political self-rule took the shape of complete independence in its application at the time of Indian struggle of independence.

²⁰ Most of the articles on '*Swaraj*' written by Bal Gangadhar Tilak were published in the newspapers *Kesari* and *Maratha* edited by him.

D. Narrow and Broad Senses of Swaraj: in Political Context:

In the context of India's struggle for freedom, *swaraj* seems to have acquired at least two senses – one is, complete independence as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo and other Nationalist leaders; while the other is, self-rule or colonial self-government as envisioned by Moderate Congress leaders. We can distinguish between these two connotations as the broad sense of *swaraj* and the narrow sense of *swaraj*. Whether these two ideas of *swaraj*, both as complete independence and colonial self-government, are if not antagonistic to one another, then surely opposite or supplementary to one another as a matter of discussion which we have to deal with.

In its broad sense, the word *swaraj* stands for 'self-government'²¹ or complete independence or *purna swadhinata* (*purna swādhinata*) to the Nationalist Congress leaders like Bipin Chandra Pal, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Aurobindo Ghose. To explain this we can say that in etymological sense the word '*swaraj*', according to Sri Aurobindo, may stand for '*swadhinata*' or independence; not only of a nation, but also of an individual.²² He in his article "The Meaning of Swaraj" written in the book *Speeches* clearly defined that 'Swaraj means administration of affairs in a country by her own people on their own strength in accordance with the welfare of the people without even nominal suzerainty, which

²¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Pherozshahi at Surat", p. 246

²² Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, 'The Meaning of Swaraj', p. 36

is the object which we wish to attain'.²³ This is the best explanation of calling *swaraj* as complete independence by the nationalist leaders as well as by Sri Aurobindo. Nationalist leaders for this above reason considered *swaraj* as an essential sign of political liberty or complete independence.

Whereas in the narrow sense of *swaraj* the word stands for self-rule or 'Colonial Self-Government'²⁴ to Madam Kama, Anne Besant, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, Dadabhai Naoroji etc Moderate Congress leaders. It was Dadabhai Naoroji who first introduced the thesis of *swaraj* in the sense of colonial self-government in the Calcutta session of Indian national congress in 1906.²⁵ This narrow sense of *swaraj* was thought to be accepted by their successor M.K. Gandhi but later he reformulated it in his own way. Colonial self-government stands for establishing a government of representatives of people under the supervision of the foreign rule and working as its colony. In the political perspective of the then India the preaching for colonial self-government by the Moderate Congress leaders would ensure to colonize India under the British rule. We can get the clear reason behind calling *swaraj* as self-rule if we go through the doctrine of Gandhian *swaraj*. *Swaraj*, according to Gandhi, can be considered as self-rule. In the word *swaraj*, 'swa' stands for an independent group to Gandhi. To explain elaborately, the meaning of 'swa' is, to him, an independently working group and 'raj' means rule. Hence the word '*swaraj*' stands for an independent group that rule over people. In

²³ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, 'The Meaning of Swaraj', p. 34

²⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Results of the Congress", p. 202

²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 201-202

this way, Gandhian notion of *swaraj* stands for democracy or democratic rule of an independent group on people. This is reason behind Gandhi's describing *swaraj* as nothing else than self-rule.²⁶

E. Gandhian view of Swaraj:

It has often been held that Gandhi's doctrine of *swaraj* is quite prominently different from that of Sri Aurobindo in nature. Through a comparative analysis of Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of *swaraj* with that of Gandhi's concept we may try to throw some light on the matter. Actually after the disappearance of Sri Aurobindo from the field of active Indian politics Mahatma Gandhi appeared. Gandhi understood the importance of *swaraj* and in his hand its meaning expanded from colonial self-government to *purna (pūrṇa) swaraj* at the time of Indian political movement started from 1917.²⁷ Hence in this way Gandhi could be called as a true successor of Sri Aurobindo because he practicalized the notion of *swaraj* dreamt by his predecessor.

Gandhi's *Swaraj* is mostly known to be *Hind Swaraj*. *Hind Swaraj* is not merely a protest against violence; it is also a protest against the ongoing administrative system. To Gandhi *swaraj* is a delicate thing and the means to achieve it is also a much more delicate process. Actually over his thought of *Hind Swaraj*, the influence of Tolstoy and Ruskin is prominent. Basically Tolstoy's Kingdom of God

²⁶ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: (Volume – Six) The Voice of Truth*, p. 440

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 445

is the basis of Gandhi's *swaraj* or self-rule where he also, like Sri Aurobindo, advocated the arousal of the Kingdom of God within our own selves.²⁸

Gandhi was mainly thought to take *swaraj* in the sense of self-rule. But how he tried to convert his theory is as follows: 'The word *Swaraj* is a sacred word, a Vedic word, meaning self-rule and self-restraint, and not freedom from all restraint which 'independence' often means... I (Gandhi) have, therefore, endeavoured to show both in word and deed, that political self-government, that is, self-government for a large number of men and women, is no better than individual self-government, and, therefore, it is to be attained by precisely the same means that are required for individual self-government or self-rule.'²⁹

From this quotation we can actually gather the true picture of Gandhian *swaraj*. In his opinion, *swaraj* stands for self-rule for individual and also for a nation. This self-rule is taken in the sense of individual self-rule or self-government by Gandhi which is the basis of even his theory concerning political self-rule.

It is true that Gandhi also believed in the idea of political self-rule i.e. political self-government which was interpreted as complete independence by his many followers but actually his political self-government is *Ramraj* (*rāmarājya*), which is called as true democracy by Gandhi, where every individual will in literal sense could practice self-restraint and self-rule.³⁰ This theory of political self-rule is not so

²⁸ Shriman Narayan (eds), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: (Volume – Six)The Voice of Truth*, p. 446

²⁹ Ibid, p. 440-441

³⁰ Ibid, p. 444

easy to understand as in Gandhian view, political self-government is essential for bringing individual self-government. In his view, a self-government which fails to satisfy the demand of individual self-rule cannot be considered as a good instance of political self-government. A government which ensures the self-rule of all individuals is the true instance of political self-government. That political self-government, ensuring individual self-government of all, can even be within the foreign rule. This is the reason why his theory of *swaraj* was thought by me to be the modified form of colonial self-government.

It will be unjust, according to me, if we consider Gandhian theory of *swaraj* as complete independence like that of Sri Aurobindo. His *purna (pūrṇa) swaraj* is ‘*purna*’ in the sense that there remains no discrimination of castes, sects, religions or sections among Indians that can prevent them from practicing *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) as two important corollaries of *swaraj*.³¹ His political sense of *swaraj* is similar not with complete independence, rather that of colonial self-government or dominion status. He was okay with the idea of freedom of will of Indians if the British government mercifully bestows that on us. He was in the state of practical day-dreaming that British government will allow enough political freedom in the hands of the Indians. He thought that if dominion status (in 1926 Great Britain had declared that British dominions are autonomous communities within the British empire, equal in status in any domestic or external affairs with it, though have to be loyal to Britain) could ensure our freedom of will then it is

³¹ Shriman Narayan (eds), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: (Volume – Six)The Voice of Truth*, p. 445

worthy to be welcomed. His main aim was to attain individual self-rule but whether it comes in the disguise of dominion status in India under the British administration or in the form of colonial self-government where India has to exist as subordinate colony of England, he simply was not very interested to think for. The proof is to be found in the book *Hind Swaraj* where Gandhi clearly wrote to pray before the British government to bestow individual self-rule of Indian citizens.³² His main intention behind the preaching of *swaraj* was to seek the kingdom of God from within.³³

Actually Gandhi, in the context of Indian politics in pre-independent India, was not completely in the mood of rejecting the British rule. He was in the favor of making a stable nation with political freedom of its people; whether within the foreign rule or without, did not matter to him. But the political turmoil of India of Gandhi's time actually forced him to preach for *swaraj* as complete independence after *Satyagraha* movement of 1917, *Ahimsa Asahayog* or Non-cooperation movement of 1920-1922 and *Bharat Charo* or Quit India movement of 1942-1944. Hence Gandhi's idea of *swaraj* as self-rule subsequently will be shown to be somewhat different in nature than that of Sri Aurobindo's concept of *swaraj* as complete political independence. However Gandhi gradually transformed his idea of colonial self-government to complete independence unlike Sri Aurobindo following the necessity of politics in India. It will be not be wrong to mention that Gandhian

³² Gandhi, M.K., *Hind Swaraj*, p. 298

³³ Shriman Narayan (eds), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: (Volume – Six)The Voice of Truth*, p. 438

theory regarding *swaraj* even though remains in the sense of self-rule in its theoretical level but it transformed into the sense of complete political independence while using it in practice in the arena of Indian independence movement.

It is true that Gandhi's idealism of establishing the 'kingdom of God'³⁴ perhaps seems quite similar with the metaphysical approach of Sri Aurobindo but the way he had chosen to reach there is very ideological and full of day-dream I must say. By the help of truth (*satya*) and non-violence (*ahimsa*) how to reach this kingdom of God Gandhi failed to show.

F. Sri Aurobindo's view of Swaraj:

Sri Aurobindo had his unique thesis on *swaraj* where we can discover his inherent political sense along with the spiritual sense. In the political sense, it is the essential weapon in the hands of Indians so that the achievement of political freedom becomes possible. In the spiritual sense, it stands as *mukti* or the way to reconcile the human race with the Divine.

Now let us develop these ideas broadly.

- **Political sense of Swaraj:**

While discussing Sri Aurobindo's political sense of *swaraj*, let us try to focus on how he deduced the meaning of *swaraj* as political independence. For this we have to go through the political background of the then India in brief.

³⁴ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: (Volume – Six) The Voice of Truth*, p. 446

Moderate leaders of Congress never accepted the broad sense of *swaraj*, i.e. complete independence, rather took it in the limited sense of colonial self-government as mentioned by Dadabhai Naoroji in the Calcutta session of Congress in 1906.³⁵

Now what is meant by the ‘Colonial Self-government’³⁶? Sri Aurobindo explored that under the head of colonial self-government, India, like all other colonies, would get the chance of making imperial conference with the colonial Prime Ministers and put all demands before the Secretary of States in a five-minute interview.³⁷ The Secretary of States is undoubtedly an Englishman who can never truly realize the needs of subordinate colonies. Is this enough for India? Sri Aurobindo never considered it sufficient for a huge country like India. Actually under the disguise of self-government within the British Empire, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, our foreign rulers tried to keep India under its control so that in the name of any Governor or Lieutenant General it would rule over India throughout coming few centuries.³⁸ Under this colonial rule, India would pretend to enjoy its power of representation similar with representation in the Local Board, Local Legislative Councils or Municipal Board. Common masses would remain as enslaved as they were under the British Government. Whenever asked about their share in the politics, in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, the British rulers would give a suitable

³⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Results of the Congress”, p. 201-202

³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 202

³⁷ *Ibid*, “Yet There is Method in It”, p. 205

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 205-206

excuse that they are not in the governmental power, as it was controlled by the elected representatives of major Indian political parties.³⁹ The prominent example would be The United states of America as a colony under England. Americans had to show their anger in the occasions of Boston Tea Party and had to fight for liberty under the guidance of George Washington, who later also became the first President of America, to achieve complete independence from the grasp of the British rule.

The idea of colonial self-government never struck appealing to Sri Aurobindo's thought. In his intelligence this prayer and petition thesis was revealed just as an advanced form of begging [which actually means pleading] advocated by the Moderates in front of the British bureaucracy. For that reason he even criticized the Moderate Congress leaders as the bunch of beggars.⁴⁰ He criticized this theory as it could not be applicable in practice because of the lack of its method. On the contrary, self-government could be attained very easily by the help of *swaraj* as its method. Because *swaraj* was the open demand of the Indians of that time for attaining self-government, so he gave so much emphasis on it. While we look at the history of politics, we see that *swaraj* in the sense of independence was basically indispensable at that time in India, but unfortunately this thesis was accepted by the Congress leaders only after the appearance of Mahatma Gandhi in the political field.

³⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Yet There is Method in It", p. 205

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 206

The demand for complete self-government, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, is actually essential for making India free from political bondage.⁴¹ For making India completely liberated from the dominance of British rule, the preaching for self-government or complete independence seemed completely mandatory to him. India needed some time to become self-sufficient and the practice of self-government would be helpful enough in this endeavor. Here Indians had been given the opportunity to develop their own government where the administrative powers enjoyed by the members of the Governmental body, Secretary of the States etc administrative organizations, had to be nested completely upon them.⁴² At this period Indian masses had been given the power to elect their own representative bodies enjoying the overall administrative, judicial, social, political as well as cultural responsibilities. In a self-governed country the foreign rulers should not get enough opportunity to supervise the administrative, judicial, social as well as the political workings of the nominated Indian representatives. Then they will not at all get the scope to dominate, enslave or torture over Indian citizens; and India will be liberated from the shackles of the British Bureaucracy in its appropriate sense. Truly comprehending this situation, as a good political thinker, Sri Aurobindo was in the favor of getting self-governance i.e. complete independence, instead of colonial self-governance, from the hands of British masters.⁴³

⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, “Our Work in the Future”, p. 58-59

⁴² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “British Protection or Self-Protection”, p. 216-217

⁴³ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, “Our Work in the Future”, p. 58-59

- **Spiritual sense of Swaraj:**

Respectively on 24 January, 1908 at Nasik and 26 January, 1908 at Dhulia Sri Aurobindo lectured that the word ‘*swaraj*’, in our ancient literature, stands for *mukti* or salvation.⁴⁴ The soul when it is free from all worldly temptations can have gained *swaraj* or *mukti* (*sarvam paravasham dukkham sarvam atmavasham sukham*)⁴⁵. The term *swaraj*, in his view, has a spiritual overtone. Sri Aurobindo described it as a “*parash pathar*” or alchemic stone of Indian politics⁴⁶ without whose help the revival of ancient Indian glory never become possible. If we analyze the inherent meaning of his concept of *swaraj*, then we will surely discover that *swaraj*, in his opinion, is far from the reach of politics alone. *Swaraj* is a somewhat spiritual concept without being just a political one.

What is the spiritual meaning of *swaraj*? From the *Vedas*, Sri Aurobindo quoted the word ‘*sva-mahimni*’⁴⁷ i.e. union of individual with the Divine. This concept of *sva-mahimni*, derived from the *Vedas*, shows that individual being is nothing else but divinity hidden within. We have to evoke this divinity for our own betterment. Due to the sheer existence of *avidyā* or ignorance we can mistakenly think of us as different from the Divine. But when this *avidyā* ceases to exist then we will truly realize that we are nothing else but the representation of the same *Brahman*. This *avidya* has to cease to exist when *ātma-jñāna* or *tattva-jñāna* (self-knowledge)

⁴⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, “The Meaning of Swaraj”, 35 & “Swadeshi and Boycott”, p. 41

⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 41-42

⁴⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Swaraj”, p. 699

⁴⁷ Ibid, “Justice Mitter and Swaraj”, p. 513

comes in the mind of *jīvātman*. Then *jīvātman* becomes the same with *Paramatman*. This is in short Sri Aurobindo's spiritual sense of *swaraj* where the word *swaraj* stands for *mukti* or liberation, in the sense of *sva-mahimni*. However this theory of unification between *jīvātman* and *Paramatman* (*Paramātman*) can also be seen in the *Gita*.

But let me explain that Sri Aurobindo's spiritual sense of *swaraj* is not completely devoid of political touch. For attaining this spiritual goal, according to him, we need to fulfill the dream of attaining the political liberty of a nation. The arousal of the inner divinity within an individual can make him nearer to *Brahman* by following the path of *mukti*; but it is not at all a sufficient position, even though be considered as the necessary position in individual life. The nation also has to identify the inner divinity of all men residing within. Here the discovery of collective *mukti* or freedom of all individuals residing in the same nation, instead of individual *mukti* or freedom, seemed desirable to Sri Aurobindo. In this way, by realizing the spiritual sense of *swaraj*, we can identify us as the manifestation of *Brahman*. But for this we need to achieve the political liberty of India as a nation; because a nation, if politically imprisoned, fails to realize such spiritual sense behind the existence of its residents (i.e. they all are none but *Brahman*).⁴⁸ Here beautifully Sri Aurobindo correlated the spiritual sense of *swaraj* with its political meaning.

⁴⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Justice Mitter and Swaraj", p. 514

G. Reconciliation between Political and Spiritual senses of Swaraj: Reasons given by Aurobindo:

It is quite difficult to co-relate Sri Aurobindo's political notion of *swaraj* with the spiritual meaning as cited from the *Vedas*. It may stand in two ways – (a) inherent spiritual urge stands behind the political sense of *swaraj*; and (b) political *swaraj* advocated by Sri Aurobindo is just a means for gaining the spiritual unity with the Divine.

Firstly, Sri Aurobindo gave reasoning behind his advocacy of *swaraj* theory from its political and spiritual senses. Metaphysically he compared our fight against the tyrannical British rule as the fight against demons or *asuras* using *swaraj* as the tool in our hands and as planned by the Divine. In an letter to his disciple, written in March 13, 1944, Sri Aurobindo explained the main reasons for his advocating *swaraj* as a political agitation and not as a sign of hatred against foreign rule while incorporating the spiritual sense beautifully with it by saying that – ‘You should not think of it as a fight of certain nations against others or even for India; it is a struggle for an ideal that has to establish itself on earth in the life of humanity....Those who fight for this cause are fighting for the Divine and against the threatened reign of the *asura*.’⁴⁹ Thus the fighting for *swaraj* is compared by him with the fight with the demons. It is our responsibility to fight against the demons for the Divine and *swaraj* is the way to establish humanity over the universe by killing the demons according to the divine plan as conceived by Sri

⁴⁹ Navajata, *Sri Aurobindo*, p. 46-47

Aurobindo. In this way the political sense of *swaraj* agitation gets beautifully reconciled with its spiritual interpretation in the view of Sri Aurobindo.

Secondly, in his many articles Sri Aurobindo preached that *swaraj* agitation, in the sense of political independence, must stand as the starting-point of *swaraj* or *mukti*, in the sense of spiritual divinity. However this spiritual sense of *swaraj* is not quite different in sense than the well-known definition of political *swaraj* as the second one is just an important corollary of the first one to him. Let me explain it. Without political freedom the achievement of spiritual freedom is not at all possible. Political dependence makes men used to slavery and slavery brings gradual destruction of not only in the individual life, but also in the life of an entire nation. One cannot be spiritually free or *mukta* unless he can attain political freedom. A nation, in the same way, cannot be spiritually free or *mukta* unless it can obtain its political freedom. In this way, according to Sri Aurobindo, the political sense of *swaraj*, as independence, stands as the gateway of achieving that the spiritual sense of *swaraj*, as *mukti*.⁵⁰

We become acquainted with the idea that how superbly he reconciled between the spiritual and political senses of *swaraj* and makes them the corollary of one another. Again in his Dhulia Speech in 1908 we become acquainted with the true sense of *swaraj* as depicted by Sri Aurobindo. Here he explained ‘There has been much discussion about the definition of Swaraj. Swaraj has been defined as self-government. It has been defined by Dadabhai Naoroji as self-government colony. In

⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Swaraj”, p. 701

our view, self-government is merely one aspect of swaraj.....The meaning of Swaraj, in our ancient literature, is the spiritual condition of the soul which attains to Mukti. When the soul is independent of everything but itself, when it exists in the joy of its light and greatness, when it is Mukta *that* is Swaraj. According to our ancient philosophy, *sarvam paravasham dukham sarvam atmavasham sukham*: All dependence upon others is misery; all dependence upon ourselves is bliss. This is the fundamental truth.⁵¹ *Swaraj*, in Sri Aurobindo's view, stands for salvation or *mukti*. However this salvation is not only individual salvation, rather the collective salvation. Because, according to him, an individual without the support of others cannot be able to evoke the Supreme within so that the Supreme comes down to the earth for making the Life Divine. *Swaraj* is the symbol of independence to him, and by its assistance he wanted to get rid of all kind of dependency, be it spiritual or political. But let me make it clear that here I am taking *swaraj* in the mere sense of political independence. *Swaraj* stands for independence and this independence can be, in this way, political in nature.

We can take the same word from its spiritual sense also. Let me explain his spiritual sense of *swaraj* following the quotation. While analyzing Sri Aurobindo's notion of *swaraj* we have to start our discussion with the Divine as every earthen creature is nothing except God himself. Even the so-called human race is a kind of manifestation of this Divine. But due to their sheer ignorance or *avidyā* they never become able to assemble with the *Brahman*. *Swaraj* stands as a back-bone of such

⁵¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "Swadeshi and Boycott", p. 41-42

realization because it is a method for realizing the inner divinity of mankind i.e. the arousal of the Supreme inherent within. Being influenced by the *Vedanta* philosophy, Sri Aurobindo clarified the meaning of *swaraj* as *mukti* or salvation.⁵² There are several forms of salvation according to the *Vedanta* philosophy: *sāmīpyo mukti* i.e. the salvation making men nearer to the Divine, *sājujyo mukti* i.e. the salvation where men can be similar with the Divine, *svārūpyo mukti* i.e. the salvation where men becomes Divine-like and can evoke a divine life within the region of the divine body. While going through Sri Aurobindo, we can demonstrate that the purpose of his appraisal of *swaraj* is to make men's life a divine life and if *swaraj* stands for *mukti* or salvation then it can be called specifically as *svārūpyo mukti* because it is always helpful to make the entire human race Divine-like in Sri Aurobindo's thesis as all earthen creatures including humans stand for nothing else than God or *Sachchidanada* himself to him. The spiritual sense of *swaraj*, in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, deciphers human beings or *jīvātman* as the sole manifestations of God or *Paramatman* (*Paramātman*). When we can understand this true identity of us then there remains no difference between us and God. Thus his thesis seems somewhat similar with the theory of *svārūpyo mukti* of the *Vedanta* philosophy where men have to be *Iswara-svarūpa* or God-like.

H. Comparison of views of Gandhi with Aurobindo:

Gandhiji and Sri Aurobindo both have unique contribution over the notion of *swaraj*. Let us start with comparing their theories with each other.

⁵² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Surat Congress", p. 639

- **Similarity of Gandhi and Aurobindo:**

However we can notice enough similarity between their notions. From *the Vedas* Sri Aurobindo derived the true meaning of *swaraj* as ‘*sva-mahimni*’⁵³ i.e. arousal of the inner divinity of the individual. In his view, *swaraj* is in a sense, concentrating on the realization of divinity of man by the ideals of independence, unity and liberty. His main intention was to reach the Kingdom of Heaven.⁵⁴ And Gandhi also desired *swaraj* or self-rule for all people, which is nothing less than the realization of divinity within individual upon this earth. Gandhi’s view of *swaraj* is supposed to be greatly influenced by Tolstoy’s idea of kingdom of God for like him Gandhi also mentioned that every man has to follow his conscience seeking to know the kingdom of God lying within.⁵⁵ Hence for advancing towards the kingdom of God, it is assumed by us that, even in Gandhian thought some amount of inner divinity hidden within humans is strongly advocated; his rejection of using violence against our foes is another proof of such belief. From here we can say that both of these two thinkers shared the unusual fundamental similarity regarding their view of *swaraj* when taken from the spiritual sense. *Swaraj* stands for the discovery of the inner divinity of the human race in the opinions of both Gandhi and Aurobindo.

⁵³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Justice Mitter and Swaraj”, p. 513

⁵⁴ Ibid, “The Demand of the Mother”, p. 853

⁵⁵ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: (Volume – Six) The Voice of Truth*, p. 446

- **Dissimilarity between Gandhi and Aurobindo:**

But while discussing about the means of achieving *swaraj*, we may come across inherent differences in their thoughts. Even though both of them agreed to accept passive resistance as a means of *swaraj*, but from commonsense viewpoint, Sri Aurobindo's theory is much more acceptable than that of Gandhi. There arises a question – for gaining *swaraj*, as political independence, whether we need to accept the path of active resistance if necessary, or to remain limited only within the boundary of passive resistance? Generally it is said that while Gandhi took passive resistance as the ultimate end, Sri Aurobindo advocated the use of active resistance whenever seems urgent. To bring out the true perspective of Gandhi and Aurobindo, we need further deliberations. Actually at the time of Indian political movement from 1917 onwards Gandhi's *swaraj* theory, based on *satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence), took the form of passive resistance.⁵⁶ He always emphasized on the non-violent form of movement, even somewhat unnecessarily. In his view, passive resistance must be the ultimate way to be strictly followed. Even for the sake of self-defense an individual does not get any chance to use violent means as it will assault the inherent divinity residing within the wrong-doer. This is originally an absurd thought. In British India, the upraising voices of Indians to protest against the British bureaucracy had been stopped abruptly. The foreign rulers tried every possible means to stop the development of Indian national movement demanding independence of India. Here we discover Sri Aurobindo's

⁵⁶ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: (Volume – Six) The Voice of Truth*, p. 445

theory is much more justifiable as he mentioned rightly that when our political leaders are only restricted to make peaceful and armless gatherings against the British government, then we should not reject the path of passive resistance; but when our voices has been stopped abruptly to protest against the British constituency, then the help of active resistance is mandatory. Under British India, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, the situation had worsened in such a way that it became utterly impossible to follow the path of passive resistance strictly. When our own house has been caught in fire, then we cannot simply enjoy the sight. When someone tries to murder us, then our whole attention will be directed towards preventing him, whether violently or non-violently that does not matter. In this respect Sri Aurobindo was absolutely right not to consider passive resistance as the ultimate means. In the book *Bande Mataram* he claimed that when the limits of coercions would be enlarged in a devastating way such that it can destroy our national life, then no room is left other than choosing the path of active violence.⁵⁷ During that sort of situation the choice for passive resistance as the only method would seem to be the sign of cowardice. In that case, active resistance should be strictly followed by us as our most holy duty performed towards our mother-land. Sri Aurobindo gave emphasis on gaining *swaraj*; the means of achievement is not to be given so much importance by him. It has to be explored further how Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of *swaraj* is able to overcome the limitation arisen in the case of Gandhi's concept of *swaraj*.

⁵⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Limits", p. 114-115

However it should be made clear that the difference of Sri Aurobindo and M.K. Gandhi lays between the applications of their theories regarding *swaraj* but the inner senses of *swaraj* i.e. ‘the kingdom of God’ of Gandhi⁵⁸ and ‘the kingdom of Heaven’ of Sri Aurobindo⁵⁹ is astonishingly quite similar.

However we can have another interpretation of *swaraj* in the sense of *sanatana* (*sanātana*) *dharma* as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. His books *The Human Cycle*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and several articles from *Bande Mataram* had given hints about them which I want to discuss elaborately in my chapter. Let us go through it in our next segments.

I. Sri Aurobindo on Swaraj and Nation:

Before indulging into Sri Aurobindo’s theory of *swaraj* as *sanatana dharma* we have to start with the concept of nation as implicitly related with it. Sri Aurobindo’s notion concerning nation is somewhat unique as compared to others. According to him, a nation is considered to have an inner unity, termed as centripetal unity, instead of a loose external political unity i.e. centrifugal unity belonging to an empire.⁶⁰ A nation is utterly different from that of an empire. A nation is practically considered to be indestructible, until it destroys from within. Empire is considered by Sri Aurobindo as political machinery, and hence in due course of time it has to

⁵⁸ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: (Volume – Six) The Voice of Truth*, p. 446

⁵⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Demand of the Mother”, p. 853

⁶⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, “Nation and Empire: Real and Political Unities”, p. 36

be crushed.⁶¹ But because a nation is not a political unit, hence it seems to be immortal in nature. According to Sri Aurobindo the nation has three different bodies, e.g. gross, subtle and causal.⁶² The gross or physical part, comprised of geographical lands, can be destroyed with time but nation has to sustain because of its causal or consciousness part. The people, with their consciousness, living within are the subtle part of a nation. Therefore a nation is considered by him as a psychological entity.

Now there arises a question regarding the discovery of consciousness of a nation. How a nation, the non-living entity, can have consciousness? This is the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought where he considered that even a nation can have consciousness within. Let me try to explain it. A nation cannot exist without its individual. An individual has consciousness within. This individual consciousness is the gateway of the group-consciousness; as man, being a social being, cannot live without a group. In the similar way group-consciousness or group-soul serves as the gateway of nation-soul as a nation has several groups within. In this way we can justify Sri Aurobindo's notion of nation-soul i.e. a nation having consciousness within.

Whenever we indulge into the discussion about the notion of *swaraj* the concept of nation, in the sense of nation-state, is included within the fold of this discussion. *Swaraj* was just a method taken first by the Nationalist leaders and then by Indian

⁶¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "The Ancient Cycle of Prenational Empire-Building", p. 95

⁶² Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "National Education", p. 13

masses so that by the help of attaining political freedom we can uplift our own country, India. Hence with the notion of *swaraj* the theory of nation, in the sense of nation-state, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, is correlated and to be thoroughly discussed. So we have to go through the concept of Sri Aurobindo's nation-state in this context.

J. Inadequacy of State Idea: Aurobindo:

Sri Aurobindo like Karl Marx (1818-1883) never accepted the theory of state at all. His social-political doctrine is astonishingly related to the much lesser known aspect of it i.e. the psychological aspect, when he discovered the existence of consciousness factor in a nation. Hence his theory of state should be quite different in nature than that of the common theory of states. State is thought to be always limited within the geographical territory; hence it is not considered as a living entity by us. It is considered by common people as a non-living or material entity comprised with several geographical planes and lands. In his view, state or *rāstra* is not at all a similar with nation; nation or *jāti* is a living entity comprised with individuals residing in the national territory, while state is organic entity.⁶³ Individuals, as the parts of the nation, have several minds and souls; hence the nation, as a whole, comprised of individuals, has also unique minds and souls for its own. So nation as a union of the individual-minds and individual-souls also has its own nation-mind and nation-soul as its unique characteristics in his opinion. Thus as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, a nation, as a psychological entity, is supposed to

⁶³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "The Inadequacy of State Idea", p. 28

contain mind and soul like any other living organism.⁶⁴ But state, as a non-living organism, cannot be related with individual mind or soul; hence the existence of state-mind or state-soul is just out of question to him. Marx also rejected the existence of state, in the sense of bourgeois state, as a symbol of torture of the richer class (*Bourgeoisie*) over the poorer class (*Proletariats*)⁶⁵ like Sri Aurobindo. However Sri Aurobindo became capable, unlike Marx, to draw a strong line of difference between the theories regarding the state and the nation. The state, as a non-living entity, according to him, is deprived of any existence of the soul hidden inside like that of the nation.

Sri Aurobindo gave several reasons for declining the existence of modern state-idea. If we go through his book *The Ideal of Human Unity* then we will get adequate reasons for this.⁶⁶

First, an individual, according to him, cannot surrender his individuality to state or state cannot draw it out of the person.⁶⁷ A state can be considered as a moral state even if the freedom of its people is under the knobs of the gun; e.g. that what happened in pre-independent India. The morality of the state has nothing to do with the freedom of its people. For example the monarchy, bureaucracy, dictatorship etc are different types of states where the ruling administrative power of the state

⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Discovery of the Nation-soul", p. 35

⁶⁵ Marx, Karl & F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 18

⁶⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "The Inadequacy of State Idea", p. 26-33

⁶⁷ Ibid, p. 27

cannot guarantee the freedom or individuality of the citizens. Hence Sri Aurobindo was not in the favor of the state idea as he mainly wanted to ensure the freedom of all. His state thesis is quite related to Hegel (1770-1831) and post-Hegelian theories of the state as mind objectified. Hegel and post-Hegelians, like Sri Aurobindo, also thought that without considering the individual mind we cannot reach the concept of state at all as state is comprised with individuals.

Secondly, state has directly nothing to do, in Sri Aurobindo's view, with the human progress.⁶⁸ Human individuality is closely connected with the group individuality instead of state. Because in the social level, the state formation procedure is as follows: individual → group → state → nation. Individual remains at the core of society and nation at the top of it. Hence the soul of the human beings can very easily be transmitted to the group, the immediate next level of it.

Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo emphasized on a very limited role of state. It has to indulge itself into maintaining the needs of human life like that of health, sanitation, economy related problems.⁶⁹ It has to nest itself into providing happiness and seeking progress for individual life. In this way a state can be used as the machinery provided to seek happiness and progress in human life, but never as a means of globalization or internationalism. In a state no individual can seek to comprehend the value of universal brotherhood which is a way to go towards the road of internationalism.

⁶⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "The Inadequacy of State Idea", p. 27

⁶⁹ Chattopadhyaya, D.P., *Sri Aurobindo and Karl Marx*, p.98

Fourthly, a state, according to Sri Aurobindo, is dominated by its ruling bureaucratic class which is not made up of the best brains constituting the state. Hence the state, from the time of its formation, is not considered to be flawless to him. The best brains or the genius persons will be afraid to take part in the formation of a state as the state is considered to be a machine of torture to Sri Aurobindo.⁷⁰ The deformities and faults made by the bureaucrats in administrative works made the state open subject of criticism and even to perish with the due course of time.

Fifthly, according to Sri Aurobindo, in a state the largest good of all inhabitants is not at all ensured even though it was thoroughly promised.⁷¹ A nation should ensure the large amount of good of individuals, but not a state. A state, being a tyrannical machine in the hands of its administrative powers, indulges only in ensuring the happiness of the ruling bureaucrats or aristocrats, but not of the labor class constituting the large portion of a state. In this regard we can discover Sri Aurobindo's similarity with that of Karl Marx.

Sixthly, the state is considered by Sri Aurobindo to be the crude machinery in the hands of the ruling government. It works just like a machine in his view.⁷² A machine works devoid of brain. A state also does not get the usual help from its best brains as it concentrates only on the administration of the ruling parties over it and

⁷⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "The Inadequacy of State Idea", p. 28

⁷¹ Ibid, p. 27

⁷² Ibid, p. 31

the men enjoying administrative bliss is not bound to be the best brains or genius masterminds of that state.

Seventhly, the state, according to Sri Aurobindo, tends to become static and homogeneous in nature.⁷³ This stagnancy, in his view, helps to make its growth timid. The uniformity of any state is also not at all welcomed by him as bringing up uniformity among all parts of a state-government is also a mechanical process. We need variation to grow rapidly. Variation will bring change in the life-structure, whereas uniformity brings stagnancy and gradual death or decay of a state as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.

Eighthly, a state tends to become, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, very crude and rigid in nature. It always tries to control over the lives of all of its inhabitants.⁷⁴ And this crude controlling over its inhabitants would destroy their power of liberty and make them dependent upon the state-government for taking any little bit decision of their own lives. Thus the strong control of a state over its inhabitants is not worthy to be welcomed in Aurobindian thesis.

Ninthly, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, a state, being completely mechanical in nature, is devoid of any soul ingredients hidden within, either be the individual-soul or the collective group-soul. It is considered to be a 'military, political and economic force' by him.⁷⁵ A state, in his view, tries hard to suppress the natural

⁷³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "The Inadequacy of State Idea", p. 30-31

⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 31

⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 28

growth of the individual and also of the group by the help of its political and administrative powers. This non-existence of soul-factor makes a state utterly different from that of a nation.

These are reasons for which Sri Aurobindo was not in favor of using the notion of state in his social and political thoughts.

K. Nation with Soul Factor: Reasons behind:

Generally nation is never considered to be nation-state by us as we discover in Sri Aurobindo's doctrine. Nation, according to him, is a lively object with soul and mind unlike state.⁷⁶ The nation with the immense possibility of having soul within is thus called to be the nation-soul by Sri Aurobindo. If we call it simply as nation, then the existence of soul inherent within cannot be described fully. State, according to him, is limited within its geographical identity; but nation is expanded beyond the geographical identity of it as it has the soul-factor.

We can give two possible different explanations for calling nation as Nation-soul by Sri Aurobindo as following his book *The Human Cycle*.⁷⁷

The first explanation can be as follows. Nation is made up of matter, but matter itself, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not non-living in nature. Matter has immense hidden potentialities of being awoken by the call of the Absolute Being i.e. God.⁷⁸ It

⁷⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Discovery of the Nation-Soul", p. 35

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 35-43

⁷⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, "Matter", p. 253

is known to have the *supto chaitnya (caitnya)* or hidden consciousness within. Hence the nation made up of it has to be conscious in nature. Thus the conscious nation can be declared as nation-soul. However let me make it clear that it is not at all his declaration. It is completely my derivation based on his view about the hidden consciousness factor of the matter as told by him in *The Life Divine*.

In its second explanation, as viewed by Sri Aurobindo, we can say that a nation is made up of several individuals having souls and minds as their inner characteristic features.⁷⁹ The individuals with soul-factors can, in the sociological structure, be united under the heads of different groups for their own subsistence. In this way several different group-souls are made up of individual-souls. However for maintaining their existence, whenever found necessary, these groups should be united within a stronger head. And this stronger head is none other than the nation itself. Thus briefly speaking, individual-souls have to be united as the group-souls which can later be expanded into the supposed nation-soul.⁸⁰ This second explanation seems much more satisfactory than the previous one from the point of view of Sri Aurobindo. Sri Aurobindo himself accepted this explanation.

Nation devoid of soul factor, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not at all acceptable. However it is really very difficult to understand how nation has got the soul within. In general, nation or *rāstra* is never commonly thought to be soulful like Sri Aurobindo. Can an ordinary person devoid of the knowledge regarding philosophy

⁷⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Discovery of Nation-Soul”, p. 35

⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 35-36

understand the notion of Sri Aurobindo's nation-soul? By the way if we go through the philosophy of Sri Aurobindo, then we can discover the hidden touch of metaphysics everywhere. A common man can never thought of a nation with soul-factor. But he, on the contrary, never thought of a nation devoid of soul. Therefore we have to admit that the social-political thought of Sri Aurobindo is not devoid of the inherent metaphysical touch.

L. Nation-Soul and Nationalism:

In the article named 'National Education' of the book *Speeches* Sri Aurobindo clearly described his concept regarding nation and why it is known to be nation-soul to him.⁸¹ In this context Sri Aurobindo developed the notion regarding three parts of the nation. Such as man has three different body types, e.g. gross, subtle and causal bodies; the nation also, according to him, has gross, subtle and causal bodies of it.⁸² A human being has a gross body made up of matters; a subtle body having soul within; and a causal body made up of the parents. In the similar way the physical part of a nation like India stands for the geographical lands, regions or districts extended from Kashmir in North to Kanyakumari in South; Gujrat in West to North-Eastern regions in East. This is the gross body of the nation-state in Sri Aurobindo's view. The citizens of India, sharing their sorrows, pains, pleasures etc emotions with each other, are made up the subtle body of the nation. And that part of the nation which remains the same within every change around the time-period,

⁸¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "National Education", p. 13-14

⁸² Ibid, p. 13

and as permanent as the atom or seed state within any nation, is known to be the causal body of the nation.⁸³ This causal body of the nation stands to him as nothing else but the consciousness or soul-factor.

Perhaps because of the existence of the subtle and causal bodies of nation, which constitutes of individual-souls along with the group-souls, Sri Aurobindo considered nation as a living entity with unique kind of consciousness hidden within.⁸⁴ This can be called as the most acceptable criteria for calling a nation as nation-soul. But it is quite unfortunate that we commonly cannot be able to grasp the inner meaning of his doctrine regarding nation-soul.

The nation-soul, according to Sri Aurobindo, is comprised of the group-soul of the individual. In this context, for making our position clear, we can quote Sri Aurobindo's own explanation – ‘One may see even that, like the individual, it (nation) essentially is a soul rather than has one; it is a group-soul that, once having attained to a separate distinctness, must become more and more self-conscious and find itself more and more fully as it develops its corporate action and mentality and its organic self-expressive life....This objectiveness comes out very strongly in the ordinary emotional conception of the nation which centres round its geographical, its most outward and material aspect, the passion for the land in which we dwell, the land of our fathers, the land of our birth, *country, patria, vaterland, janma-bhūmi*. When we realise that the land is only the shell of the body, though a very

⁸³ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, “National Education”, p. 13-14

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 13

living shell indeed and potent in its influences on the nation, when we begin to feel that its more real body is the men and women who compose the nation-unit, a body ever changing; yet always the same like that of the individual man, we are on the way to a truly subjective communal consciousness. For then we have some chance of realising that even the physical being of the society is a subjective power, not a mere objective existence. Much more is it in its inner self a great corporate soul with all the possibilities and dangers of the soul-life.’⁸⁵

Now we can try to discover the inherent meaning of this quotation as follows:

Firstly, according to Sri Aurobindo, a nation has inherent soul lying within. A man has soul. A group, made of several individuals with soul, also has inherent soul. And hence a nation, made up of individuals and groups, also has a soul inherent within.

Secondly, what is meant by him when he claimed that ‘the land is only the shell of the body’? It means that, according to him, in making of a nation, the land remains as the outer self or part of the nation. The inner self is the countrymen and women. The land, as a geographical entity, is rigid and stagnant part of a nation that can never change. But the inner parts of a nation, comprised of individuals with consciousness, is a living and dynamic part of the nation that can be changed with periods of time.

Thirdly, the individuals, belonging to the same nation, share the same amount of consciousness i.e. ‘communal consciousness’ as described by Sri Aurobindo.

⁸⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Discovery of the Nation-Soul”, p. 35-36

Individuals have consciousness as every man is a conscious being. But, when taken in group-sense, we can discover the existence of group-consciousness among all individuals residing into the nation as following him.

Fourthly, the 'physical being of the society', to him, is made up of living individuals. Individuals are conscious living beings. Hence the physical part of the society i.e. the individual is clearly subjective in nature as dynamic and changing. The objective part of a society is made up of the static and constant geographical lands.

Fifthly, according to him, in other nations, the nation is known to be the *pitṛ-vūmi* (*pitri-bhumi*) i.e. 'the land of our fathers'. But in India, the land is worshipped as our *māṭṛ-vūmi* (*matri-bhumi*) i.e. Motherland, as Sri Aurobindo beautifully calls it as our land of birth or *janma-vūmi*.

In the theoretical doctrine of Sri Aurobindo we find out the difference between people and nation. He felt that even Asiatic civilizations in their most flourishing political periods had been dominated by social, religious and cultural ethos of the people and not by the ruling class. In Sri Aurobindo's perception nationalism is a living force and has a soul of its own. In his book named *The Human Cycle* he has endeavored to discover the living force of nationalism and thus mentioned that 'The nation or society, like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist'.⁸⁶ He saw the genesis and growth of Indian

⁸⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Discovery of the Nation-Soul", p. 35

nationalism being primarily motivated from the West. The relation between nation-state and individual is that of the mother and son relationship to him.

While discussing about the relationship between nation-soul and nationalism we can say that Sri Aurobindo tried to formulate some eternal religion that will help to grasp the soul-factor hidden within its individuals. Every individual is a conscious being. He tried to develop the idea of that eternal religion which will get hold of the consciousness factor of all individuals residing within a nation. Neither Hinduism, nor Islam, nor Judaism alone can be sufficient for this immense task. For that reason Sri Aurobindo developed the idea of *swaraj* as *sanatana dharma* or eternal religion that could focus on identifying the soul-factor of individuals residing within the same nation devoid of their class, sect and religious differences.

M.Swaraj and Sanatana Dharma:

His doctrine of *swaraj* is co-related with that of nationalism.⁸⁷ India's urge towards nationalism did never escape his observation. This demand for nationalism is not considered by Sri Aurobindo as a mere political propaganda unlike some other thinkers. Sri Aurobindo believed that it is a religion that directly comes from God.⁸⁸ Hence this demand for *swaraj* seems to be eternal in nature to him. In this sense we can say that *swaraj*, in the sense of nationalism, is eternal religion. But why *swaraj* is called as religion taking it in the sense of *dharma*? For understanding it first of all we have to understand the meaning of the word '*sanatana dharma*' as conceived by

⁸⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, "The Ideal of the Karmayogin", p. 2

⁸⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 652

Sri Aurobindo. In the etymological sense, we can translate it as eternal religion, as the word ‘*sanatana*’ literally means ‘eternal’ and the word ‘*dharma*’ means ‘religion’. However *swaraj* is not thought to be religion in the common sense. It is considered to be *dharma* in its spiritual overtone. *Sanatana dharma* is neither Hinduism, nor Judaism, nor Islam. Some critics draw resemblance between *sanatana dharma* and Hinduism which is not acceptable to Sri Aurobindo. In the article “The Ideal of the Karmayogin” he exclaimed that Hinduism is a paradigm of eternal religion⁸⁹ which clearly shows that Hinduism, in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, is not *sanatana dharma*. On the contrary, this *sanatana dharma*, according to him, contains ‘the mere dress and body of Hinduism’ and hence he concluded that the *sanatana dharma* should be the higher kind of Hinduism.⁹⁰ The wider kind of Hinduism which could include Islam, Christianity and Judaism could be considered as *sanatana dharma*.⁹¹ Hinduism, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, can be the basis of *sanatana dharma*, the future world-religion. But in its actual sense *sanatana dharma* is like the essence of all religions. All religions took shape from this *sanatana dharma* or eternal religion which like Plato’s ‘form’ resides outside the reach of them. Eternal religion is the eternal truth that every religion tries to discover but unfortunately fails to do so. His notion of *sanatana dharma* is considered to be similar with Vivekananda’s Universal Religion by critics. However Aurobindian theory of *sanatana dharma* could be differentiated from

⁸⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, “The Ideal of the Karmayogin”, p. 5

⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 5

⁹¹ Ibid, p. 5

Swami Vivekananda's Universal religion as the basis of Vivekananda's Universal religion is Hinduism based on Practical *Vedanta* unlike Sri Aurobindo. *Sanatana dharma*, according to Sri Aurobindo, is a religion, in the sense of *dharma*, based on Truth as commanded by God instead of Hinduism.⁹²

But why *sanatana dharma* is believed by Sri Aurobindo to be the eternal religion proposed by God himself? And why *swaraj*, as a mere mandatory political tool for liberating India from the bondage of the foreign country, seems comparable with the metaphysical notion of *sanatana dharma* or eternal religion by him? Sri Aurobindo mentioned that the political movement of India is nothing else but is a plan of the Divine.⁹³ The Divine plan, in his view, is nothing else but to make Indians spiritually uplifted so that they can easily re-unite with the Supreme in the process of evolution. In the process of involution, as conceived by him, *Sachchidanada*, with the help of *māyā* or *avidyā*, wants to illustrate his *līlā* and for creating the world, separates himself into material, spiritual, earthen levels as well as in lively creatures like men, animals, insects, trees etc. In the opposite process, namely the evolution, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, after some certain time-gap every lively or non-lively creature, especially men and animals, has to be united with the Almighty as they actually emerge from it before. In this way, we can find out some inherent touch of his metaphysical doctrine into the realm of the social-political one. The main aim remains behind the spiritual divinization of human race by uniting them with the Supreme or *Sachchidanada* and in this way by making

⁹² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 661

⁹³ *Ibid*, "Swaraj", p. 699

their life the Divine Life.⁹⁴ If political freedom lacks in the country, then no countrymen can even dream to indulge themselves into the process of achieving spiritual upliftment. And if political liberty is under the Divine rule of God, then according to Sri Aurobindo, *swaraj*, as its ultimate essential device, also has to be included within the master plan. And as *swaraj* is considered to be a part of the Divine plan by Sri Aurobindo, so just like its eternal creator it has the eternal character too. *Swaraj* as nationalism is considered by him as a religion directed by God.⁹⁵ In my opinion, perhaps this is the easiest explanation of calling *swaraj* as the *sanatana dharma* or eternal religion. To him, *sanatana dharma* is an all-embracing religion and an extended form of Hinduism, and yet considered to be the ultimate limit of all conventional religions.⁹⁶ We have to understand *swaraj* in this sense of eternal religion by whose help we can attain the kingdom of God hidden within us. *Swaraj* in this way stands as the road towards our inner search for freedom. This is called as our win back of inner *swaraj* by Sri Aurobindo.⁹⁷

To Sri Aurobindo, the aim of the Indian nationalist movement was the expansion of the Indian civilization and he never wanted it to be confined to the demands for political sovereignty and liberty only. Thus he was not in favor of the division of India and Pakistan at the time of Indian Independence at 1947. That is why he refused to give the welcome address to the world in the All-India Radio on behalf of

⁹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Present Situation”, p. 661

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 652

⁹⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Karmayogin*, “The Ideal of the Karmayogin”, p. 5

⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 7

the Indian people when India gained Independence on 15th August, 1947 at his birthday. Instead he wrote a brief message on his doctrine of *sanatana dharma*, in which he mentioned his five dreams, i.e. (a) unity among Hindus and Muslims for making free and united India; (b) the role that Asia needs to play towards liberating humanity; (c) world unity for protecting humanity; (d) India's spiritual gift to the world; and (e) evolving global consciousness and human unity. Sri Aurobindo specifically mentioned that India has gained political liberty from the hands of the British, instead of gaining the desired communal unity between Hindu and Muslim races.⁹⁸ Unless they are united with each other, Indian independence, according to him, will not become fruitful at all so that the Divine Life can be possible. And the process through which this essential Hindu-Muslim unity will be possible by the help of none other than the concept of *sanatana dharma* or eternal religion. Again from this citation we can easily correlate Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of *sanatana dharma* or eternal religion with that of internationalism; as internationalism is the ultimate goal of Sri Aurobindo for which he preached the doctrine of *swaraj* by advocating the feeling of universal brotherhood first among the Hindu and Muslim communities in India and then extending it through the entire universe. His last four dreams are directly related with the question of world unity or internationalism. That's why we can easily call Sri Aurobindo's doctrine of *swaraj* as a gateway of internationalism.

⁹⁸ Navajata, *Sri Aurobindo*, p. 47-48

However critics claimed about the impossibility of the theory of *sanatana dharma* preached by Sri Aurobindo. It seems very ideological theory to them as it never took a concrete shape in reality till now.

N. Sanatana Dharma and Hinduism:

It has often been a matter of controversy among the interpreters of Sri Aurobindo's notion of *sanatana dharma*. Instead of entering into any controversy, it is better to cite quotations from Sri Aurobindo to derive first-hand impression about the exact connotation of *sanatana dharma*. In the article *A Defence of Indian Culture*,⁹⁹ Sri Aurobindo claimed that – ‘The whole root of difference between Indian and European culture springs from the spiritual aim of Indian civilization... A spiritual aspiration was the governing force of this culture, its core of thought, its ruling passion. Not only did it make spirituality the highest aim of life, but it even tried, as far as that could be done in the past conditions of the human race, to turn the whole life towards spirituality... The religious culture which now goes by the name of Hinduism not only fulfilled this purpose, but, unlike certain creedal religions, it knows its purpose. It gave itself no name, because it set itself no sectarian limits; it claimed no universal adhesion, asserted no sole infallible dogma, set up no single narrow path or gate of salvation; it was less a creed or cult than a continuously enlarging tradition of the Godward endeavour of the human spirit. An immense many-sided many-staged provision for a spiritual self-building and self-finding, it

⁹⁹ The article was later incorporated in the book *The Renaissance in India with A Defence of Indian Culture* in *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, “Indian Spirituality and Life”, Vol. 20 published by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry, 1997.

had some right to speak of itself by the only name it knew, the eternal religion, *sanātana dharma*. It is only if we have a just and right appreciation of this sense and spirit of Indian religion that we can come to an understanding of the true sense and spirit of Indian culture.’¹⁰⁰

In another article ‘The Ideal of the Karmayogin’, while speaking about the relation between *sanatana dharma* and Hinduism, he mentioned Hinduism as the epitome of *sanatana dharma*.¹⁰¹ But ‘Hinduism as epitome of *sanatana dharma*’ and ‘Hinduism as *sanatana dharma*’ are never similar. Hinduism is the proper example of *sanatana dharma* but it is never equal with *sanatana dharma*. *Sanatana (sanātana) dharma*, if we follow the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, is like Platonic ‘form’ from where every religion will take its form. It is somewhat similar of Swami Vivekananda’s Universal Religion.

Sri Aurobindo’s *sanatana dharma* is based on the knowledge of spirit and the divine union among men and God. It is a religion based upon Truth. Every religion seeks the same truth but approach is different from each other. Eternal religion is that universal truth which every religion seeks to know. While referring to Mohammed, the founder of Islam, Sri Aurobindo clearly mentioned that – ‘He developed the existing social, religious and administrative customs of the Arab people into a new system dictated to him often in a state of trance, in which he

¹⁰⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India with A Defence of Indian Culture in The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 20, “Indian Spirituality and Life”, p. 178-179

¹⁰¹ Eternal religion ‘has the mere dress and body of Hinduism’ [Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Karmayogin*, “The Ideal of the Karmayogin”, p. 5]

passed from his super-conscious Self, by the Divinity to his secret intuitive mind.’¹⁰² The search for the Divine also seems prominent, to him, in Judaism and Christianity like Islam and Hinduism as, according to him, ‘all these God-visions could embrace and cast themselves into each other’.¹⁰³ The attempt of spiritualization of mankind is prevalent in every religion. The spiritual evolution of human race is the motto of not only Hinduism but every other religion. Hinduism, Christianity, Islam, Judaism etc all religions from the beginning try to divinize the entire humanity as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. Eternal religion of Sri Aurobindo is supporting essential aspects of all religions. It is the essence of all religions. It is like Platonic ‘Form’ from where we can derive the structure of all traditional religions, be it Hinduism or Islam or Judaism. It is true that Sri Aurobindo gave immense emphasis over the uses of Hindu religious symbols. But, as envisioned by him, Hinduism is the model of this eternal religion and it surely supersedes Hinduism having merely the body and form of it. In his view: ‘This Sanātana Dharma has many scriptures, the Veda, the Vedānta, the Gitā, the Upaniṣad, the Darśana, the Purāṇa, the Tantra, nor could it reject the Bible or the Koran... It is our inner spiritual experiences that we shall find the proof and source of the World’s scriptures, the law of knowledge, love and conduct, the basis and inspiration of karmayoga.’¹⁰⁴ In the article ‘The Ideal of the Karmayogin’ he clearly stated that – ‘The religion which embraces Science and

¹⁰² Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, the Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-determination*, 1971, p. 51

¹⁰³ Ibid, p. 425

¹⁰⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Complete Works of Sri Aurobindo*, Vol. 13, “Thoughts and Glimpses”, p. 39-40

faith, Theism, Christianity, Mahomedanism and Buddhism and yet is none of these, is that to which the World-Spirit moves...that wider Hinduism which is not a dogma or combination of dogmas but a law of life... in this Hinduism we find the basis of the future world-religion.¹⁰⁵ From this above discussion it becomes clear that Aurobindian thesis of *sanatana dharma* is not to be identified with any particular religion; it is loaded with secular spirit.

Sri Aurobindo himself was aware of being misinterpreted by narrow and dogmatic reading of his viewpoint. Answering to one such objection, he wrote that – ‘it is news that I have excluded Mahomedans from the *yoga*. I have not done any more than I have excluded Europeans or Christians.’¹⁰⁶ The aim of his *sanatana dharma* is the divine union of man and Supermind and in this endeavor he never excluded any culture. Divine union is utterly impossible if we can distinguish among humans keeping in mind of their race, culture or sectarian differences. Sri Aurobindo’s aim was to attain Life Divine via the means of collective salvation of human race and this aim would never be fulfilled if he focused merely over Hinduism. He never tried to show the supremacy of Hinduism over other cultures by calling it as eternal religion. This is an age-old misinterpretation of Aurobindian thesis regarding eternal religion which I am not in favor of.

¹⁰⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Karmayogin*, “The Ideal of the Karmayogin”, p. 5

¹⁰⁶ As quoted from Heehs, Peter, *Nationalism, Religion and Beyond*, p. 354

O. Swaraj: Road towards Life Divine:

How could we reconcile between these two different spiritual meanings, i.e. *sanatana dharma* and *mukti*, drawn by Sri Aurobindo himself? In its answer we can say that his main goal is to reach towards Life Divine. *Swaraj* is just a tool to attain it. *Swaraj* as *sanatana dharma* reconciles all religious differences in human life and helps us to attain *mukti* in the sense of collective salvation instead of individual salvation for the betterment of the society. These two steps make us nearer to the ideal of Life Divine as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. Let me make my position clear.

Swaraj is considered to be nationalism or *sanatana (sanātana) dharma* to Sri Aurobindo.¹⁰⁷ It is itself nationalism and by enchanting it we can unite the people of our nation irrespective of their cultural, social and racial differences. But an important question arises here – is *swaraj* the ultimate goal to be achieved or is there any other goal to be accepted behind *swaraj*? According to Sri Aurobindo *swaraj* is not the ultimate goal but is the gateway to make Life Divine. How can we call *swaraj* as the gateway of Life Divine? From the *Vedas* we get to know that *swaraj* stands for ‘*sva-mahimni*’ i.e. the relation between *jīvātman* and *Paramatman (Paramātman)*.¹⁰⁸ The person (*jīvātman*) has to be free from *ahankāra* so that he can rise to the level of *Paramatman*. By the help of *tapasyā*, being free from *ahankāra*, *jīvātman* can become *Paramatman*. *Swaraj*, in the sense of *mukti*, brings human beings to the level of *Paramatman* by removing the *ahankāra* of *jīvātman*.

¹⁰⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, “The Ideal of the Karmayogin”, p. 2

¹⁰⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Justice Mitter and Swaraj”, p. 513

In this way *swaraj* stands for the way towards achieving individual *mukti* or salvation as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.¹⁰⁹ We need to attain it in the context of collective *mukti* or salvation also.

But how is it possible? If we accept *swaraj* in the same sense of Sri Aurobindo as nothing else but actually the divine union between *jīvātman* and *Paramatman* (*Paramātman*); then we have to admit that we, the human beings, are none other but the manifestations of the Supreme. We have to truly realize that there is no difference between men to men, nation to nation, race to race, sect to sect. All humans are the true manifestation of God. Thus we have to go beyond the limit of nationalism and to revive the feeling of universal brotherhood within us. But for realizing this we need the help of the concept of *swaraj* in the sense of *sanatana dharma* which will help us to be free from the bondage of *ahankāra*.

Actually the difference of Sri Aurobindo's thesis of *swaraj* with that of other Indian thinkers is that he always preached for collective salvation instead of individual salvation. A person after getting individual salvation has to prepare himself for collective salvation of mankind, following the rule of *lokasamgraha* of the *Gita*, which will help him to call forth Supermind on earthen level and to make Sri Aurobindo's ultimate goal of Life Divine possible. Hence the spiritual sense of *swaraj* which means *mukti* or *mokṣa* has to be meant for the salvation of all human beings irrespective of his caste, sect, race, nation or body color. If we can achieve

¹⁰⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Need of the Moment", p. 764-765

collective salvation then it will be easier for us to go for internationalism. This is the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's concept of *swaraj*.

Now in the conclusion we can ask a question about the nature of national unity as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. Can we say that his theory concerning *swaraj* has no controversy to arise? *Swaraj* stands as nationalism to him. If it so then what is conceived as national unity by him? Let us try to clarify it.

A nation must have national unity to display. Is it a political unity or a religious or cultural unity? According to Karl Popper a nation has some amount of political unity.¹¹⁰ However if we evaluate Sri Aurobindo's thought, then we will discover two different types of unity advocated by him – centripetal or inner unity and loose external kind of political unity named centrifugal unity. A state has loose political unity externally imposed upon it; while, according to Sri Aurobindo, a nation has certain amount of inner psychological unity hidden within.¹¹¹ In a nation the psychological unity or the unity of hearts among its citizens is more preferable than the imposed political unity. Hence Sri Aurobindo's national unity can never be compared with political unity.

Then is it as a religious unity? Sri Aurobindo's theory of *sanatana dharma* stands for eternal religion. However it is considered as religion not in the sense of conventional religions like Hinduism, Islam or Christianity. Many critics took Sri

¹¹⁰ Popper, Karl, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Vol. II, 5th edition, p. 51

¹¹¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "Nation and Empire: Real and Political Unities", p. 36

Aurobindo as a prophet of Hindu revivalism via the help of his theory concerning *sanatana dharma* like that of Swami Vivekananda. But his theory is unlike Vivekananda as Vivekananda considered Hinduism as the universal religion. While in the view of Sri Aurobindo Hinduism is the paradigm of this eternal religion but it surely supersedes Hinduism. His eternal religion has the mere body and form of Hinduism but not Hinduism.¹¹² His eternal religion is actually the essence of all religions. Every religion tries to reach towards that eternal religion. In this sense his theory is more similar to the religious thoughts of Ramkrishna Paramhansa. Aurobindian theory of national unity thus could not be connoted as religious unity. Therefore it would not be impractical to declare that his preached national unity is nothing else but human unity (among all residents of the nation) itself. In this way Sri Aurobindo's thesis of nation, with national unity inherent within, serves as the gateway of human unity.

However Sri Aurobindo's notion of *swaraj* could be able to give birth to controversy as a nation never seemed to be an inanimate or non-living object to him. A nation is always believed to be a conscious being to him as he discovered the existence of consciousness as the causal part of a nation-body.¹¹³ The existence of consciousness in trees and plants were proved by Jagadish Chanda Bose so if one can say something about the existence of tree-consciousness it will be easy enough for us to comprehend. But the consciousness factor hidden within a non-living entity like nation is still to be proved. And before we get enough proof in hands in

¹¹² Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, "The Ideal of the Karmayogin", p. 5

¹¹³ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "National Education", p. 13-14

the favor of existence of consciousness factor in matter as well as in nation it is very hard theory to be believed by us. Even though Sri Aurobindo called that matter has *supto chaitnya* or hidden consciousness¹¹⁴ but it is yet to be proved. Hence the soul-factor of a nation advocated by Sri Aurobindo gives birth to sufficient amount of controversy from our commonsensical point of view. However Sri Aurobindo's explanation is quite unique where he considered individual souls as the soul-factor of a nation, but we have to understand that this objection is only from the point of view of common people who are unable to comprehend the inner meaning of Aurobindian theory of nation-soul.

The uniqueness of Aurobindian theory of *swaraj* is that while the other contemporary Indian political thinkers take it in the political sense, he yet took it in somewhat spiritual sense. In the process of making the Divine Life when he talked about the existence of ignorance or *avidyā*, *deś* or space, *kāla* or time, *māyā* or nescience; then the inherent touch of *Vedantism* becomes quite prominent. If we look deep into Sri Aurobindo's explanation of *swaraj* doctrine we can discover the existence of spiritualistic touch everywhere. *Swaraj* stands in the sense of liberation or freedom to him that he symbolically mentioned as *mukti* or *mokṣa*. His comparison of *swaraj* with that of *sanatana dharma* or eternal religion is also spiritual in nature. Any religion has certain boundary against it, but an eternal religion certainly lacks it. *Swaraj* as eternal religion is not limited within the boundary of any nation, but with the help of universal fellow-feeling, it has to reach

¹¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Life Divine*, "Matter", p. 253

the vast arena of internationalism. This preaching for universal fellow-feeling and internationalism are just the gateway of Sri Aurobindo's dream of fulfilling Life Divine by the help of obtaining collective salvation for all. Sri Aurobindo's main aim was to make the individual life the Life Divine and the person who best fitted for it has to be self-less in nature and to think about the welfare of all. Individual salvation can make a person near to the Almighty or *Sachchidanada* but it cannot be done unless he has universal fellow-feeling for all individuals irrespective of their castes, sects or religions. In this context I presume that the individual salvation theory of the *Vedas* has been transformed into the notion of collective salvation in the hands of Sri Aurobindo in his social-political thought. Sri Aurobindo's *swaraj* theory is unique in contribution as it serves not only as a means of attaining individual freedom but also as the gateway of internationalism and Life Divine unlike others politicians of contemporary India.



Second Chapter

The Boycott

In the social-political theory of Sri Aurobindo *swaraj* seems to be the path mandatory, to the interpreters, for transforming a common life into the Life Divine and boycott remains as one of its important corollaries. In his spiritual dream of fulfilling the union with the Divine, he had taken the political path as he truly realized that for making our country wholly prepared for this spiritual destination, our first priority must be the attainment of its political freedom. Political liberty, in his opinion, serves as the gateway of achieving the spiritual liberty.¹¹⁵ He had a firm belief over India's spiritual excellence and hence predicted that for making our mother-land as the spiritual guide of all other spiritually backward nations it has to be made free from the shackles of its political servitude.¹¹⁶ The boycott is actually treated as an excellent weapon in this regard. Here we have to be free from the bias that Sri Aurobindo in his social-political thought has extraordinary bent towards spirituality. Actually he tried to incorporate spirituality even within the domain of his politics. So while stating about his social-political thought we cannot detach it from its hidden spiritual implication. The attainment of social and political

¹¹⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Swaraj", p. 701

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, p.701

freedoms, according to Sri Aurobindo, is utterly impossible if the individual does not have the liberty of his soul (spiritual freedom).¹¹⁷ Boycott is generally a political act of voluntary abstaining from using, buying or dealing with a person, organization or nation as an expression of protest against any kind of exploitation, usually used for political reasons. It can be used in the local, provincial, national as well as in international context of politics. Local to international politics can be affected by the good as well as the bad sides of boycott. Prior to India, the Europe was quite accustomed to such use of boycott in the political context. However without entering into any historical details about the implementation of the tactics of boycott we may concentrate upon the concept of boycott as found in the social-political thought of Sri Aurobindo. Karan Singh called Sri Aurobindo as the prophet of Indian Nationalism and in his opinion Sri Aurobindo wanted to attain political liberty of India by whatever means, be it violent or not.¹¹⁸ The active resistance as a means may seem to be much more acceptable as it gives us instant success. The active resistance or armed revolt including use of weapons, guerilla warfare, and secret attacks over the ruling party, are to be restricted within very limited area of a nation. The formation of secret societies is also mandatory for the ultimate success of such active path of resistance. The success of active resistance, using violent weapons and clandestine activities, may be attainable only after a very short time span; while passive resistance gradually leads us towards the achievement of political freedom of the nation. Briefly speaking resistance, whether active or

¹¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Swaraj", p. 700

¹¹⁸ Singh, Karan, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism: A Study of The Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh 1893-1910*, p. 118-119

passive, was a means of showing protest against the British rule over India for nearly two decades. The boycott is supposedly the highest kind of passive resistance. The boycott was used just as a way to show our capability of political resistance to the foreign rulers at the time of Indian freedom movement.

Sri Aurobindo did not identify national movement of India for gaining freedom just as an affair of secret societies and clandestine activities. The attainment of India's political freedom, to him, through several violent acts of revolutionary parties or secret societies was not the appropriate way. Sri Aurobindo, even though, known popularly as a revolutionary activist or extremist, accepted both the path of violent and non-violent means to gain freedom from the British servitude. Both passive and active resistances are included by him within the vast arena of defensive resistance.¹¹⁹ In his writings the need for an overall nationalist movement boycotting the tyrannical rule of the British government was an imperative. Boycott is the way to resist the ruling administration passively. In this respect boycott agitation became synonymous with the passive resistance movement spread over Bengal and all over India 1905 onwards.

Boycott is a mere form of passive resistance to Sri Aurobindo, however the highest of all.¹²⁰ The boycott as an idea in the context of Indian history of nationalism stands for the refusal of Indians to help the British administration being completely passive towards the foreign laws and orders, instead of being indulged in direct

¹¹⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Conclusions", p. 119

¹²⁰ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 101

active revolt against it. While the idea of passive resistance also conveys somewhat similar meaning. So we can easily understand the truth behind Sri Aurobindo's mention of boycott as the first principle of passive resistance.¹²¹

A. Etymological sense of Boycott:

Now let us concentrate on the expression 'boycott'. The word 'boycott' entered into the dictionary of politics following the name of Captain Charles Boycott, the land agent under a landlord, Lord Erne, who lived in County Mayo of Ireland in 1880. As the condition of harvest had been very poor those days, Lord Erne offered his tenants a ten percent reduction in their rents instead of their demand of twenty-five percent. But peasants did not accept this offer and showed their protest against Lord Erne, the Landlord. Then, unable to put up with the situation, Boycott attempted to evict eleven tenants from the land to break the backbone of the movement. But the result was devastating in nature. The situation became worse then as Boycott soon found him isolated; his workers stopped working in fields and even in his home, local businessmen stopped working with him, and even the local postmen refused to deliver his mails. Within weeks Boycott's name became famous in everywhere. The term 'boycott', derived from the name of Charles Boycott, was used by *The Times* in November, 1880 (in the view of Karan Singh the year was 1881¹²²) as a term for organized form of isolation and this movement was named after Boycott. Till now whenever any kind of violent or non-violent protest movement took place anywhere

¹²¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 101

¹²² Singh, Karan, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism: A Study of The Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh 1893-1910*, p. 120 (in the footnote)

in the entire world to isolate the party concerned who was held responsible for causing unfair or illegal treatment it is named as boycott.

There are many examples of boycott movements in the international political context, such as Montgomery bus boycott, the successful Jewish boycott organized against Henry Ford in USA in the 1920, the boycott of Japanese products in China after the May Fourth movement, the Arab League boycott of Israel and other companies trading with Israel etc.

In the history of Indian politics when the theory of boycott was first advocated is still unknown. Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee in their book *India's Fight for Freedom* gave this credit to Tahal Ram Ganga Ram who early in 1905 preached the ideal of boycott for the first time in his speeches at Calcutta according to the I.B. Records, West Bengal Government.¹²³

B. Two Trends of Boycott Movement in India:

According to Sri Aurobindo, the Boycott agitation in India took the form of two different trends.¹²⁴ The first trend was the constructive *swadeshi*. This is the constructive side of boycott movement. In this phase the Indian merchants were given some chance to grow up in their own feet and to expand their *swadeshi* or indigenous business in such a way that they could be able to compete with British merchants by abandoning the use of foreign imported goods and by rejecting the

¹²³ Mukherjee, Haridas & Uma Mukherjee, *India's Fight for Freedom or The Swadeshi Movement (1905-1906)*, p. 33

¹²⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Graduated Boycott", p. 293

export of Indian goods, like silk, Indigo etc. to the foreign lands. This non-political trend's backbone was dependent upon the revival of the economical standard of the Indian life. Its result will be fatal as it will hit over the growth of foreign economy in Indian subcontinent. This was first successfully employed by Bal Gangadhar Tilak among its mill workers in Maharashtra during 1893-1895 at the time of Ganapati *utsav* and Shivaji festival.

The second trend is the turn towards political extremism in Bengal. This side is extreme in nature as it tends to boycott the British government instead of constructing something new. It is, according to Sri Aurobindo, the destructive side of boycott movement. This trend was advocated majorly by Aurobindo Ghose and Bipin Chandra Pal. The Anti-Partition Movement or the *Banga-Vanga Andolon* of 1905 was its most prominent example. This side of boycott was a mighty attempt at the vindication of the rights of the people to self-government, which used the various techniques of political agitation such as mass processions, public meetings, strikes, *dharnā* or picketing, *anaśan* or fasting etc. However we have to differentiate this trend from the clandestine activities of Bengal revolutionaries which started almost at the same time.

C. Sri Aurobindo's notion of Boycott: Its Constructive and Destructive aspects:

In Sri Aurobindo's opinion there are five different categories of boycott:¹²⁵

1. Industrial or economic boycott
2. Educational boycott

¹²⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance", p. 101-102 & 112

3. Judicial boycott
4. Administrative or executive boycott
5. Social boycott

- **Economic Boycott and Swadeshi:**

According to Sri Aurobindo, the British merchants were eventually responsible for the economic exploitation of India; thus we need to boycott the British goods so that we could promote our own *swadeshi* industries.¹²⁶ This was considered as the economic or industrial boycott to him.¹²⁷ The economic boycott is truly meant for boycotting British goods so that the foreign merchants should fail to exploit the Indian merchants and small traders. The main aim of the British government behind making India as one of its colonies, like America, is to exploit its richness. Clothes, sugar, indigo etc goods were indeed produced in India and sold in other foreign markets openly by the British merchants. Raw materials in India were very cheap, so they bought those materials in cheap rate from our country; and exported them to England to make good quantity of goods from them; and then exported them again in Indian market and other foreign markets to sell these goods in high rates. For that reason the clothes made in Manchester and exported to India were higher in cost for the common Indian masses. These goods were, thus, made available only to British officials and Indian rich people. The urge for economic boycott at the time of boycott movement of non-independent India was based on two major inferences – first, the British rule in India was mainly dependent on its economy which came from gradual exploitation of our country; secondly, by boycotting the British goods,

¹²⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Graduated Boycott”, p. 293

¹²⁷ Ibid, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods”, p. 101-102

Indians could be able to give a devastating blow over the British economy. Eventually both of them are quite relative to each other. Because, according to Sri Aurobindo, if the Indian economy was exploited by the British people then by boycotting their goods we can fetch back the golden era of the early India.¹²⁸ Hence the urge for economic boycott of foreign goods is just a time-bound incident.

In this political background when economic exploitation over the Indian subjects increased day by day in pre-independent India then the preaching for economic boycott seemed very urgent in nature. In that situation Sri Aurobindo's support for economic boycott seemed quite justified. To quote from Sri Aurobindo who wrote as follows: 'Accordingly, we refuse to help the process of exploitation and impoverishment in our capacity as customers, we refuse henceforth to purchase foreign and especially British goods or to condone their purchase by others. By an organised and relentless boycott of British goods, we propose to render the further exploitation of the country possible.'¹²⁹

Let us try to comprehend what he wanted to convey in this quotation. The chronic famine and rapid impoverishment were cited by him as evidences for the failure of the British government to protect the people of India. After the win in the Battle of Pallasey it was very easy for them to concentrate the entire economy of Bengal in their own hands. In this endeavor the Charter Act of 1813 and the Government of India Act of 1833 helped to gain the East India Company complete trade monopoly

¹²⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Graduated boycott", p. 293-294

¹²⁹ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 101-102

over India. These acts also gave them the sovereignty over Indian economy which was thoroughly exploited by them. Due to the concentration of Indian economy in the hands of the East India Company the economic conditions of Indian people differentiated on the basis of their social status. The middle class and the upper class became rich while the lower class grew poor. Due to the forceful cultivation of opium instead of food crops in 1770 and the forceful exportation of food crops outside India in 1943 the conditions of Indian farmers worsen and these were the main causes behind the Bengal famines of 1770 and 1943.

However throughout our discussion it is notable that the British government not only failed to protect the people of India, but it also lacked the interest to do the same. That is the reason behind Sri Aurobindo's saying about that the British government refused to protect the Indian people and their industries. Actually the East Indian Company wanted to enjoy their sovereignty over Indian economy; and if the small industries led by the Indian people could earn more, then their trade monopoly would face difficulty. Till 1757 the Company was indulged with revenue collection from Indian states. After 1757 their main intention behind making India as their colony was shifted into exporting their local goods in Indian market in high rates and exporting opium etc raw materials produced in India outside. Hence the East India Company tried to stop the development of the small Indian indigenous industries by hook or by crook. These are the reasons behind Sri Aurobindo's preaching for economic boycott on the backdrop of Indian political movement.

An important corollary of economic boycott, according to Sri Aurobindo, is *swadeshi* i.e. encouraging the development of national goods manufactured in any

part of India.¹³⁰ So, not only the negative side of Boycott, but also its positive side was developing gradually. So boycott was not only used to hamper the British rule, but also to develop Indian indigenous industries by promoting Indian goods. Thus from Karan Singh's writings, we can find out that boycott has two great objectives hidden behind. The first is to shake the foundations of British power in India; the second is to bring about a rapid growth in indigenous industries for producing goods required by Indian people, by whose help the economic resurgence of the nation will be possible.¹³¹ The most successful example of economic boycott was 1917's Salt March of Gandhi where he made salts from the Sabarmati river near Dandi.

However the true founder of Gandhi's boycott thesis was none other than Sri Aurobindo himself. In his view, we can fulfill our aim of economic boycott only when the alternative is ready to be used. In Bengal we could start boycotting first clothes, sugar, salt and other materials depending on the successful implication of the alternatives of boycott on them. Liverpool salts could be boycotted only when *Karkach* (a desi salt popular at that time) was available. The import of Manchester clothes in India could be affected only when we have readymade handloom industry available to satisfy our need of clothes.¹³² According to him, we could boycott foreign clothes and salt as we have alternatives available in hands. But the trial of

¹³⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Graduated Boycott", p. 294

¹³¹ Singh, Karan, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism: A Study of The Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh 1893-1910*, p. 124

¹³² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Graduated Boycott", p. 294

boycotting foreign sugar, in his view, was not fruitful as the alternative was not available in our hands. He also conceived that we could not boycott the use of foreign exported yarns as spinning industry that required yarns were limited in numbers¹³³ till Gandhi entered into politics in 1917 (as he was the person who made the concept of handloom popular by advocating for spinning our own clothes in *charkha* for which the production of yarns seemed mandatory). But it does not mean that economic boycott was not at all successful in India at the time of Sri Aurobindo. It had left great impact over the British administration as the administration was largely dependent on the collection of taxes from foreign merchants. Economic boycott successfully gave a blow over the root of the British economy which affected the foreign rule tremendously. This is the reason behind the instant success of economic boycott in India.

- **Educational Boycott and National Education:**

In the same way Indians, according to Sri Aurobindo, have to reject the British system of education and try to reconstruct the educational system of India in new way. This was named as the educational boycott by him.¹³⁴

The English education act or Macaulay's *Minute* of 1835, written by Thomas Babington Macaulay, clearly explained that the British government actually wanted to make Indian clerks to help in their administrative works so that they could rule over India for several more decades. Two other barbarous acts, enacted by the

¹³³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Graduated Boycott", p. 294

¹³⁴ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 102

British government in pre-independent India, were capable enough to raise the fury of Indians. The 1904 Indian University Act demanded self-less obedience from Indian students; while the Carlyle Circular of 1905 prohibited the participation of the Indian students in direct politics. These two acts made the preaching for educational boycott inevitable at that time.

In this context let us try to realize Sri Aurobindo's theory of educational boycott. According to Sri Aurobindo 'We are dissatisfied also with the conditions under which education is imparted in this country, its calculated poverty and insufficiency, its antinational character, its subordination to the Government and the use made of that subordination for the discouragement of patriotism and the inculcation of loyalty. Accordingly we refuse to send our boys to Government schools or to schools aided and controlled by the Government; if this educational boycott is general and well-organised, the educational administration of the country will be rendered impossible and the control of its youthful minds pass out of the hands of the foreigner.'¹³⁵

From this quotation let us try to evaluate Sri Aurobindo's reasoning behind his advocating for educational boycott in 1905 in the context of Anti-partition movement. In his view the foreign educational system encouraged by the British government had to be boycotted as:

First, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, it was unable to discover the national character of India as the traditional system of education would always encourage Indian

¹³⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 102

youths to learn in English. Truly I feel that in British educational system Indian students were encouraged to know about how London Bridge falls, instead of knowing the history of India. It would never help the Indian pupil to understand the national characteristic of India. Hence it would prohibit the Indian youths from participating in the Indian national movement started on 1905. However this plan of the British government was never be successful.

Secondly, the British government encouraged calculated poverty in the context of spreading English education all over India as reflected by Sri Aurobindo. What did Sri Aurobindo mean when he uses the term ‘calculated poverty’? It may mean that when the foreign government encouraged English as a medium of instruction in Indian schools and colleges their main intention was to make *desi babus* or Indian Clerks. The educational fee of the government schools and colleges were heavy in expense and hence poor people are deprived of the opportunity of attaining education from them. The Bengali, Urdu etc other Indian medium schools and colleges were not encouraged by the government. Hence very skillfully the British government encouraged spreading of education, via English-medium government schools and colleges, only among rich people; instead of all. The British educational system at that time proficiently tried to impose class difference among the Indian society; these classes were: the educated class and the uneducated class. As education is related with the question of earning so the poor Indians could not earn their livelihood. They became bound to live in extreme poverty. Perhaps this is the theory of calculative poverty in Sri Aurobindo’s view.

Thirdly, the governmental education system of pre-independent India, according to him, was always subordinate to the British government. The education they encouraged for the Indian youths had the only objective to make educated Indian clerks who could help the British officials in their administrative works. These persons, because of their ignorance of their own culture, should follow their English officials blindly. They do not acquire independent thinking faculty because of their ignorance of Indian culture. These educated Indian clerks, as conceived by Macaulay in his *Minute*, will be Indian in blood while English in opinion.

Fourthly, education nested upon the Indian youths via the medium of foreign language would, according to Sri Aurobindo, discourage the growth of patriotism in them. When we give Indian youths education through foreign medium then this foreign education prevents them to realize patriotic feelings about India. Seriously, even in my point of view, if we get too much energy wasted to learn an unknown language, like English, Latin, Greece etc, then it will be an unnecessary burden upon the weak shoulders of the Indian students. For understanding the national culture, rituals and religions the Indians should be encouraged to learn their own languages that British government skillfully escaped.

Fifthly, Sri Aurobindo called for educational boycott by whose help the dominated India could throw a threat towards the English medium educational system in the Pre-Independent India. In his view, if we can organize the educational boycott very skillfully then the British government would be bound to accept the justified demands of the Indians and withdraw their clerk-making process. At the time of Bengal Partition movement or *Banga-Vanga Andolon* Indian youths made the

foreign masters bound to accept their demands by the help of several successful demonstrations of educational boycott. They boycotted governmental institutions and rejected governmental degrees and awards in the protest of the notorious Bengal Partition at 1905. In this way Sri Aurobindo's notion of educational boycott was made successful at the time of Bengal Partition in 1905.

However the process of establishing National educational system never became much fruitful as the British government very soon realized the fault of the ongoing educational system in pre-independent India. The students, who left their colleges or universities, after the sudden departure of Sri Aurobindo from the political field, got distracted. Bipin Pal was deported. Tagore was busy with the fulfillment of his dream of *Shantiniketan* and his political career was too short just like Sri Aurobindo. Actually after the amendment of the Anti-Partition Bill in 1911 the whole movement lost its glory and also the educational boycott as its one of the essential part.

- **Judicial Boycott and National Arbitration Court:**

Judicial boycott, according to Sri Aurobindo, is another very well-known form of boycott.¹³⁶ British judicial system was another symbol of their tyrannical rule over India and its masses. They had enacted several barbarous laws in this regard, e.g. the Bengal Regulation Acts of 1812 and 1818, Vernacular Press Act of 1878, Newspaper Act of 1908, Press Act of 1910, Defense of India Act of 1915, Rowlatt Act of 1919, Defense of India Act of 1939 etc. At that time in British India the

¹³⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 102

common Indians had no right claim to justice. That became prominent in the *Bande Mataram* Sedition case in 1907 and Alipore Bomb Case in 1908.

All these historical backgrounds accounted for Sri Aurobindo's thesis of judicial boycott. Sri Aurobindo wrote that – 'We are dissatisfied with the administration of justice, the ruinous costliness of the civil side, the brutal rigour of its criminal penalties and procedure, its partiality, its frequent subordination to political objects. We refuse accordingly to have any resort to the alien courts of justice, and by an organised judicial boycott propose to make the bureaucratic administration of justice impossible while these conditions continue.'¹³⁷

Let us try to reformulate Sri Aurobindo's reasons behind the preaching for judicial boycott.

Firstly, he was disappointed to see the discrimination in justice given by the British courts in pre-independent India. British people received far less punishment than their Indian counterparts for the same offence. British people could get the opportunity to secure high position in Indian judicial system e.g. the post of magistrates. The Indians, even though much qualified than the British people, would never attain the chance to secure the highest rank in the British judicial system. This discrimination in law and justice made him feel the necessity of admitting the importance of judicial boycott.

¹³⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 102

Secondly, to him, the main aim of the Indian judicial system in British India was to deprive the Indians from enjoying proper law and order in life. The British administrations secured the law and order of their dynasty for the sake of their rule over India in the name of her Highness of England. They tried to protect their own people instead of their Indian subjects. Thus for establishing lower Courts, to protect their rights of justice, Indians had to wait till the Charter Act of 1793.

Thirdly, according to him, Indians had been punished brutally by the British government. The amputation of the limbs was the common practice for stealing in pre-Independent India. They were thrown in front of fierce animals inhumanly very often for very small offences. However the British people received much less punishment for the similar kind of offences.

Fourthly, at the time of National movement the British judicial system, in his opinion, played as an important corollary of the British torture and injustice over Indians. To break the backbone of Indian political movement the British government used its judicial part very skillfully. Deportation of Bipin Chandra Pal, Bal Gangadhar Tilak and Lala Lajpat Rai, Jaliwanwala Bagh Massacre, hangings of Maharaja Nanada Kumar, Khudiram Bose, Masterda Surya Sen, Bhagat Singh, Rajguru and Sukhdev were all prominent examples of the fall of British jurisdiction.

Fifthly, Sri Aurobindo thus strongly advocated to boycott the foreign judicial system and to establish a National Arbitration Court so that we can put an end to the British injustice over India and Indians. He even encouraged establishing village arbitration courts to settle down all the disputes of the villages of India.

However if we explore Sri Aurobindo's view very carefully then we could conclude that this notion of judicial boycott was not so much fruitful at the time of anti-partition movement of 1905 while compared with economic and educational boycotts. It failed to achieve the settled goal because of two essential reasons – first, it was not at all possible to replace the supremely powerful British judicial system; and secondly, there was actually no need of replacing the old system (just because of such exceptions) as the British judiciary was in some measure devoid of any charge of partiality against their Indian counter-parts. The proper example of British justice was perhaps Sri Aurobindo himself who by the help of Deshbandhu C.R. Das escaped from suffering a long punishment by transforming it into only one year's imprisonment in the Alipore Conspiracy Case. The establishment of national arbitration court was never become fruitful as dreamt by Sri Aurobindo due to these two reasons. Perhaps we can consider this concept of judicial boycott as the weakest one among Sri Aurobindo's entire boycott theory.

- **Administrative Boycott and National Organization:**

The British administration, according to Sri Aurobindo, played the major part to sustain the tyrannical rule over India for two long decades. Hence administrative boycott, according to Sri Aurobindo, is another very well-known form of boycott.¹³⁸ The British rulers used its executive or administrative system to torture over Indian masses. They had enacted several administrative and judicial acts to hold their strong grip over the Indian territory. I have named few of them in the context of

¹³⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 102

discussing judicial boycott, hence not mentioning them again here. Now in the context of these rigorous acts imposed over the Indian subjects by the British government let us now try to understand Sri Aurobindo's opinion regarding administrative boycott.

According to Sri Aurobindo the reason behind administrative boycott is – ‘Finally, we disapprove of the executive administration, its arbitrariness, its meddling and inquisitorial character, its thoroughness of repression, its misuse of the police for the repression instead of the protection of the people. We refuse, accordingly, to go to the executive for help or advice or protection or to tolerate any paternal interference in our public activities, and by an organised boycott of the executive propose to reduce executive control and interference to a mere skeleton of its former self.’¹³⁹

Let us try to reformulate Sri Aurobindo's theory about administrative boycott as follows:

Firstly, the British administration held supreme power over the Indian subjects via the previously discussed Regulating Acts issued from 1773 to 1853. The Indian subjects were looked down upon by their foreign rulers and banned to take part in the high posts of the British administration. The highest ranks of the British administration at the pre-independent India were enjoyed by the British people instead of their Indian subjects. This kind of discrimination made by the British administration helped Sri Aurobindo to derive his theory of administrative boycott.

¹³⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods”, p. 102

Secondly, the thorough repressions of the British officials were in its supreme form everywhere in the pre-independent India. The Partition Bill of Bengal in 1905 made the Bengalis as well as the entire India furious against the British administration. Even though Lord Curzon gave an excuse of administrative problem to rule over the large province of Bengal and divided Bengal into East Bengal and West Bengal by including it into Bihar and Orissa, the main reason behind this partition was two folds: first, to satisfy the demand of the Muslims to have separate region; and secondly, to make Bengalis, the most rebellious among the Indians, indulged into the provincial fights along with the citizens of Bihar and Assam so that they never have the chance to think about the freedom of India. Sri Aurobindo, after successfully anticipating these two reasons, advocated for administrative boycott to reject this kind of British repression.

Thirdly, the British administration, according to him, used their police system to make the hands of the administration tight 1905 onwards. The Muzzafarpur bomb case was cracked for the efficiency of the British police. In several cases like, the arrest of Masterda Surya Sen in the Chittagong armory case and the death of Bagha Jatin in Balashore, the Jalliwala Bagh Case, the Bande Mataram case, the Alipore Conspiracy Case, the British police was used as an important tool to protect the British rule over India. But these were just few examples while the repression of the British police was actually enormous over their Indian subjects. This repression of the police system in pre-independent India over Indian subjects was considered by Sri Aurobindo as one of the important reasons of advocating for administrative boycott.

Fourthly, according to him, the police system under the British government failed to protect its subjects and nested its whole energy to arrest Indian revolutionaries and giving them hardest possible punishments. The duty of the police would be to provide protection to its people in which the British police failed miserably. That is the reason why Sri Aurobindo quoted the ‘misuse of the Police’ as one of the prominent reason behind administrative boycott.

For these above reasons Sri Aurobindo advocated for the establishment of national organization so that the administrative boycott could be made on strong basis in pre-independent India. The Indian political leaders at that time truly realized the necessity of establishing the national organization by whose help we could end the tyrannical foreign empire ruling over India for two decades. For that above reason Satish Chandra Mukherjee formed the Dawn Society in 1902; Tilak formed Swaraj party; Pramathanath Mitra (along with Satish Chandra Basu) formed Anushilan Samiti in 1902 and Jugantar Dal also developed as its corollary. However among them merely the Indian National Congress got the reputation of a recognized national organization only after the appearance of Gandhi in the political arena of India as an immediate result of the amalgamation of the Nationalists and the Moderates.

And actually non-payment of taxes was thought to be the most effective and tremendously popular among other forms of executive boycott. In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, by paying taxes we directly assist the administration and thus the non-payment of taxes directly hamper the executive activities of the foreign rule and in

this way our goal of executive boycott would become possible in reality.¹⁴⁰ So he warned us to use it only when the British tortures took its extreme form over their Indian subjects as it could be banned as illegal by the ruling government due to its usefulness.

- **Social Boycott:**

Social boycott, according to Sri Aurobindo, is shunning the use of foreign made goods. It also means the society's collective refusal to engage a boycotted person in the normal social and commercial ceremonies within the society.¹⁴¹ Karan Singh explored this idea of social boycott, as following Sri Aurobindo, very simple in nature. The offender, in his view, is to be shunned socially in attending parties, festivals, meetings, weddings and so on. He is to be made to feel the content and dislike of his fellow-countrymen for his anti-national activities. However, according to him, a great advantage of the social boycott was that it did not involve any direct clash with the law or employ violence.¹⁴²

Let us state Sri Aurobindo's theory of social boycott in his own words – ‘without the social boycott no national authority depending purely on moral pressure can get its decrees effectively executed; and without effective boycott enforced by a strong national authority the new policy cannot succeed. But the only possible alternatives to the new policy are either despotism tempered by petitions or aggressive

¹⁴⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods”, p. 105

¹⁴¹ Ibid, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Obligations”, p. 112

¹⁴² Singh, Karan, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism: A Study of The Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh 1893-1910*, p. 138

resistance. We must therefore admit a third canon of the doctrine of passive resistance, that social boycott is legitimate and indispensable as against persons guilty of treason to the nation.’¹⁴³

The reasons behind the advocating of social boycott by Sri Aurobindo are as follows:

Firstly, according to him, social boycott is truly helpful in increasing moral as well as mental pressure over the persons who are socially boycotted.¹⁴⁴ Suppose if we shun a person to attend public meetings; the washer men stop washing his clothes; relatives and neighbors stop talking with him; he cannot let to use the water of village ponds as the villagers ban his usage of village water and everyone is boycotting him in every social occasion then definitely he will face tremendous mental and moral pressure upon him. Without social boycott we cannot pressurize the offenders morally. This is the reason of Sri Aurobindo’s saying that social boycott increase the moral and mental pressures over the person who is boycotted by us.

Secondly, while discussing about the necessity of social boycott Sri Aurobindo claimed that social boycott has to be identified as the natural concomitant of passive resistance.¹⁴⁵ Why social boycott is called as the cannon of passive resistance by Sri Aurobindo? Let me try to make the position clear. In social boycott we are socially

¹⁴³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Obligations”, p. 112

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 112

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 112

boycotting the foreign goods and the users of them. There no space of violence could be encouraged. We have to show the boycotted persons our cold shoulders without hurting them directly. We should not use violence in the case of socially boycotting them. Here we are passively resisting the wrong-doers, who are in majority the Government employees, helping their British rulers. We are forcing them, but not violently, to stay away from helping the British government. Passive resistance is also completely devoid of aggressive kind of resistance type where we are resisting the wrong-doers only passively. In my opinion, that is the reason why Sri Aurobindo called social boycott as its natural concomitant. The main aim behind the preaching of social boycott by Sri Aurobindo was to make the hands of Indian nationalistic movement in 1905 strong by decreasing the supporter lists of the opposite party.

Thirdly, social boycott seemed the last chance of using passive resistance the failure of which could, according to Sri Aurobindo, help us to move towards active resistance. Therefore it seemed to be, in his opinion, the most effective means of boycott and we have to employ it strictly.¹⁴⁶ In economic, administrative, judicial and educational boycott we are trying to refuse the British Government and their policies though the British Government sustained because of its strong officials and police system, among whom most are Indians. But in social boycott we could very effectively cut short their support system of Indian officials. Hence it seemed as the most effective form of boycott whose failure could draw our attention towards the

¹⁴⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Limits”, p. 113

active resistance. Social boycott, truly evaluated by Sri Aurobindo, is the best way to make the foreign government forced to hear our valid demands.¹⁴⁷

Fourthly, there is another reason of preaching for social boycott of foreign made goods by him. The East India Company came in India in the disguise of the merchants. Hence the most of their earnings were dependent on the import of their local goods in India on cheap rate. If we could boycott their cheap foreign goods to be sold in Indian market then we could resist their economic power existing behind the British administration. At last, in this way, in his view, we could make a scratch on the wall of British economy.¹⁴⁸ Sri Aurobindo's this theory regarding social boycott proved very true in the context of Anti Partition Movement of Bengal in 1905.

The main reason behind the instant success of the social boycott theory of Sri Aurobindo at the time of 1905 is that among all forms of boycott social boycott seems much more crucial than others as it brings instant success which others bring gradually. Actually there is nothing new in accepting the former four types of boycott; rather the exclusiveness of his theory lies inherent in preaching for social boycott. However from 1905 (Bengal Partition movement) towards 1947 the boycott movement in India was somewhat limited within the arena of industrial boycott of salt, sugar, and clothes made in England; and it became helpful also in hampering the British educational system in the sense of educational boycott and

¹⁴⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Obligations", p. 112

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, "Graduated Boycott", p. 294

British bureaucrats along with its judiciary in the name of administrative and judicial boycotts. Thus not only economic boycott but also some amount of executive boycott and judicial boycott were preferred by the Indian political leaders at the time of Indian independence movement. However the trial for educational boycott was seen among the Indian youths partially. Social boycott was that type of boycott which was admitted more fruitful than others in the arena of Indian politics in 1905. In the context of accepting social boycott, we can find out the dissimilarity of Sri Aurobindo with that of Gandhi who never accepted the concept of social boycott as he believed in the existence of God even in our enemies.¹⁴⁹

However the boycott theory, as approached by Sri Aurobindo, not only contains the negative side, but also the positive side.¹⁵⁰ By the help of industrial boycott Sri Aurobindo dreamt of bringing a gradual development in indigenous industries based on goods manufactured in India (*swadeshi*). By boycotting the foreign educational system Sri Aurobindo developed the Bengal National College and accepted the role of its first Principal (national education). But his dream of establishing National Arbitration Courts by boycotting the British judicial system was never been fruitful and his other long cherished dream of establishing a united National organization becomes possible only in the hands of his successor, Mahatma Gandhi.

¹⁴⁹ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi: [Volume – Six] The Voice of Truth*, p. 204

¹⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Graduated Boycott”, p. 293-294

We can discover the echo of Aurobindian thought regarding constructive *swadeshi* in the book named *India's Fight for Freedom* of Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee where they gave the immense credit for the industrial regeneration of the country to the boycott movement of India. The indigenous weaving industry at that time mostly gained popularity due to boycott of British clothes and goods in India. According to them the first Indian Industrial Conference held at Banaras in December 1905 in the presidentship of Mr. R.C. Dutt focused on such features of constructive *swadeshi*.¹⁵¹

D. Comparison on views of Boycott: Aurobindo and Gandhi:

We are discussing with different types of boycott as admitted by Sri Aurobindo and tried to explain after him the rationale hidden behind such admission. Another important aspect of Sri Aurobindo's boycott theory is regarding his commitment towards its moral basis. From the doctrine of Sri Aurobindo we derive the moral justification for accepting boycott. In this connection we cannot avoid mentioning the viewpoints of Gandhiji and pointing towards the similarities and dissimilarities between Aurobindo and Gandhi.

(1) Dissimilarities of Gandhi and Aurobindo:

If we go through Gandhi's thesis of boycott, then we will discover that he always believed in giving love to his opponents. He never liked the word enemy, as he had a strong belief that all people are the appearances of the same Lord, the Almighty.

¹⁵¹ Mukherjee, Haridas & Mukherjee, Uma (1958), *India's Fight for Freedom or The Swadeshi Movement (1905-1906)*, p. 126-127

Thus he used the weapons of *satya* or Truth-Force and *ahimsa* or non-violence to win over their heart.¹⁵² Boycott seemed to Gandhi the breach of conduct towards oppressors by using violence or aggression unlike Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo criticized the critics by telling that boycott is not just a kind of aggression. It is not totally aggressive in its inner sense. Sri Aurobindo's thesis of boycott, as a corollary of passive resistance and also as the means of bringing active resistance as its immediate next step, is somewhat different in nature than that of Gandhi's boycott. According to Sri Aurobindo, war is not aggression or a means of spreading aggression. It is a battle-field where aggression may take place. Boycott is itself a war, where, in his view, we can take the help of aggression, but cannot call it aggressive in nature.¹⁵³

Secondly, boycott was never considered as a means of spreading love between the oppressor and the oppressed by Sri Aurobindo like that of Gandhi. A true *satyagrahi*, according to Gandhi, has to boycott the evil side of his enemy by the help of spreading love towards him.¹⁵⁴ We can claim by citing from Sri Aurobindo that Gandhi's thought of making love even with the enemies seemed just as utopia to him. Because, according to him, love is a divine quality, to love even the enemy is the quality of a saintly human being. It is not at all a characteristic feature of any common man. And boycott is considered to be a war by him where every common

¹⁵² Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Voice of Truth* (Volume six), 203

¹⁵³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Morality of Boycott", p. 127

¹⁵⁴ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi: Voice of Truth* (Volume six), 203

man's entry is the necessity of time.¹⁵⁵ In this way Sri Aurobindo technically criticized Gandhi's theory of spreading love towards enemies. Sri Aurobindo was never critical about the philosophy behind Gandhi's doctrine of spreading love towards the foes, rather mentioned about the technical default regarding its application.

(2) Similarities of Gandhi and Aurobindo:

The similarity between both of them is regarding the inner nature of boycott. Many critics consider boycott as an act of hate. However in Sri Aurobindo's clear vision, it should not be considered as an act of hate; rather an act of self-defense essential for the sake of self-preservation.¹⁵⁶ If it is thought to be an act of violence, then the tortured person should not resist the torture took place over him and accept his gradual death in the hands of his assailants without showing any protest. To tell that a man must not use weapon against his assailant, because it is an act of hate, is completely impractical. So it appears that in Sri Aurobindo's thought boycott is nothing else than an efficient tool used for self-security.¹⁵⁷ But it does not mean that Boycott is a weapon of the weaker class, rather a way to show the inner strength and anger of the deprived class against his assailant. In this context we can discover Sri Aurobindo's similarity with that of Mahatma Gandhi. According to Gandhi, boycott is a way to show protest against the oppressor and it is not a sign of

¹⁵⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Morality of Boycott", p. 127

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, p. 125

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 125

cowardice, rather that of inner strength of the tortured person.¹⁵⁸ Thus even though Sri Aurobindo did not admit boycott as a means of spreading love to the enemies like Gandhi, but his similarity with that of Gandhi lying in accepting the fact that in fact boycott is not at all a sign of cowardice. Boycott, according to Sri Aurobindo, is a tool not to be used by cowards as they certainly do not have enough mental strength to use it. Boycott is considered to be war by him and in any war time situation definitely the braves will participate instead of the cowards.¹⁵⁹

Another similarity between them lies in the inherent spirituality between the two thinkers. Critics thought that Gandhi accepted boycott just as an act of political awareness; but he also have a spiritualistic turn while discussing about his thesis of boycott. Just like Sri Aurobindo, who had seen *Vasudeva* in deformed shape in the bodies of even criminals,¹⁶⁰ Gandhi also accepted the inherent spirituality behind the theory of boycott as he never admitted the exercise of hate towards the wrong-doers. He also accepted the existence of God among all human beings. If we use force or violence against the opposite party then we are insulting the God residing within him. This is the reason, in my interpretation, why Gandhi, as a believer of the Kingdom of God,¹⁶¹ never accepted the use of violence as a means of insult against the wrong-doers.

¹⁵⁸ Iyer, Raghavan (eds.), *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 237-238

¹⁵⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Morality of Boycott”, p. 127

¹⁶⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, “Uttarpara Speech”, p. 78-79

¹⁶¹ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume Six: The Voice of Truth, p. 446

The boycott apparently is a sheer practical activity as such understandable via several physical actions of the then India. But interestingly neither Sri Aurobindo nor Mahatma Gandhi is bound by this sort of physicalistic interpretation of the activity of boycott. A deeper reflection shows both Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi, may be in their own ways, introduced the elements of morality or non-physicality into the core meaning of the notion of boycott. Hence we have to clearly understand that these dissimilarities between the two thinkers are drawn apparently from the context of the technical application of their theory of boycott; however the inner spiritual or non-physical approach remains the same to both of them.

E. Is Boycott a Blow over Spiritual sense of Swaraj?

Sri Aurobindo's opinion about *swaraj* is somewhat different from than that of the theories of other contemporary politicians. Most politicians understood that *swaraj* is the agitation or demonstration against the British rulers so that we can win over our political liberty. Hence, to many of them, it was just a political tool to achieve freedom. But, according to Sri Aurobindo, it has two inherent senses hidden behind, the political sense and also the spiritual sense. In the political sense, as it stands for complete political independence, his theory regarding *swaraj* is not far from that of others. But in its spiritual sense, as he quoted from the *Vedas* as *sva-mahimani*,¹⁶² it aims at the divine union between God and mankind. In this way he actually tried to show the true identity of man. Everything belonging to the world is,

¹⁶² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Justice Mitter and Swaraj", p. 513

in his view, the manifestation of the Supreme Spirit and man is not at all exception to this law.

However from here starts a misconception that initially boycott is a blow over the man-Divine connection that is aimed in his own theory relating to spiritual sense of *swaraj*. Sri Aurobindo was truly fascinated of Indian scriptures like the *Vedas*, *Puranas*, *Upanishads*, *Ramayana*, *Mahavarata*, *Gita* etc. He got the name *svamahimani*¹⁶³ from the *Vedas* where the man is represented as nothing else but the manifested form of the Almighty. Hence we have to realize our true identity that is not only similar with God, rather the representation of God. On the contrary boycott is a somewhat political concept. It has no direct spiritual relation to combat with the political one. Here we mainly want to resist the oppressor from doing wrong works and torturing us. And for doing this, boycott is a tremendously useful weapon to fight against all odds. Now boycott is of many kinds; e.g. economic boycott, administrative boycott, judicial boycott, educational boycott as well as social boycott. Most critics thought that Sri Aurobindo himself tried to override the spiritual sense of *swaraj* by introducing the social boycott where we can assault a person socially by abstaining him to be a part of any social occasion, meeting and political gathering. Here we can even abandon him from the society.

Now let us try to formulate the underlying question clearly. In the thesis of *swaraj*, Sri Aurobindo declared that, every human being is the mere representation of the divine. And in the discussion about boycott, the same person denied the minimum

¹⁶³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Justice Mitter and Swaraj”, p. 513

right of living of a man who is our oppressor. Is it at all justified? If all men are the manifestations of the Divine then how could we boycott the British officials and their like-minded Indians? How could we socially boycott them? Are not we disrespecting the inner Divinity lying within them? How could then the spiritual sense of *swaraj* and boycott, as a mere political tool, can be incompatible in our war for freedom if they have such a major basic distinction like that written above? How could then both these two theories become possible when they seem totally contradictory of each other?

Gandhiji also understood this basic dilemma and hence directed us towards the necessity of *ahimsa*. In his view, we should hate the wrong-doing of the oppressor, but not the oppressor himself. Hate the crime, not the criminals is his motto. Even the criminals have the divine element hidden within. We cannot disobey the divinity hidden in a criminal and so we should try to resist him passively. For that above reason, he never preferred the use of social boycott, even though accepted other means of boycott for attaining freedom.¹⁶⁴ Its prominent example could be seen at the time of Indian independence movements till 1947 led by Gandhi.

However Sri Aurobindo dealt with the same question in somewhat different manner. In the article named “Swadeshi and Boycott” of his book *Speeches* we get a distinct answer of this question. *Swaraj*, to him, stands as a way leading towards *mukti* or salvation and gradually becomes akin with *mukti* or salvation. But he derived another essential meaning of *swaraj* i.e. the achievement of independence

¹⁶⁴ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume Six: The Voice of Truth, p. 203

from the grasp of others. According to the ancient philosophical scriptures, while defining *mukti*, we discover that *sarvam paravasham duhkham sarvam atmavasham sukham*: all dependence upon others is the cause of misery, while all dependence upon ourselves [that we can refer as independence] is blissful.¹⁶⁵ *Swaraj* stands for the independence and boycott is just a tool to achieve this independence. It is an efficient weapon by whose help we can gather national, political as well as our very own personal independence.¹⁶⁶ Social boycott, like all other boycotts, is a medium for achieving one's own independence. And gaining one's own independence is by no means at all incompatible with the spiritual sense of *swaraj*. As via boycott, we are trying to get our independence, but are not trying to assault the oppressor or insult the inner divinity hidden within him.

For analyzing this above position, we could evaluate it after Sri Aurobindo:

Firstly, in the same article "Swadeshi and Boycott" in *Speeches* he declared that everything except boycott is *anatman*.¹⁶⁷ *Swaraj* and boycott are only *atman*. The dependency over others is also a symbol of *anatman*. Thus the motto of our boycott policy should be to get rid of all that is itself *anatman* and every kind of mutual dependence is also *anatman* and not anything else. So we have to overcome our tendency towards dependency. If we accept this meaning of *swaraj* and boycott,

¹⁶⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "Swadeshi and Boycott", p. 41-42

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid*, p. 42

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 44

even strictly as political tools, then there will certainly not take place the question of any contradiction.¹⁶⁸

Secondly, he was a person who discovered the spiritual basis of everything. His thesis regarding *swaraj* and boycott are not at all the exceptions to this rule. Due to the existence of his spiritual goal of transforming individual life into Life Divine, he totally self-surrendered in front of the plan of the Divine. In his opinion, whatever had been done with India was all planned by the Almighty Himself. India's servitude and its struggle whatever had been done, done as per the will of God. Hence *swaraj* and boycott, according to Sri Aurobindo, are tools in the hands of the Supreme and there cannot remain any contradiction between these two divine weapons at all as everything in the hands of the Divine has to be divine in nature by itself.¹⁶⁹

In this above way we can get the answer of this complicated question as following Sri Aurobindo.

F. Boycott and Violence: Turn towards Just War:

Some critics can even argue that social boycott being non-violent in nature may be justifiable, but not burning or drowning British goods in the name of industrial boycott along with other forms of boycott. However Sri Aurobindo conceived the other kinds of boycott, except the social boycott, not as morally unjustifiable, even

¹⁶⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "Swadeshi and Boycott", p. 44

¹⁶⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 660

though illegal from the judicial and administrative context. Hence the question of violence is always related with the concept of Boycott.

In its response Sri Aurobindo clearly declared that – ‘The morality of the Kshatriya justifies violence in times of war, and boycott is a war.... Aggression is unjust only when unprovoked; violence, unrighteous when used wantonly or for unrighteous ends.’¹⁷⁰

Boycott is considered to be a war by Sri Aurobindo. War is intrinsically violent in nature. Hence the critics always try hard to refute the utility of boycott by citing it violently aggressive. However if we look into the social-political thought of Sri Aurobindo then we can receive a very nice answer of this question. Sri Aurobindo symbolically called the work of national freedom movement as a *yajña* and the foreign masters as *rakshas* (*rākṣas*) and, just as we find in ancient scriptures, to drive away the demons ancient *rishis* (*ṛṣis*) had performed *yajñas*; similarly we, the Indians, to drive away foreigners out of our country, have to perform the holy *yajña* of freedom movement. To drive away the *rakshas* we can use both the *brahmatejas* of the *rishis* and the bows of the *Kshatriyas* (*Kṣatriyas*). Sometime the *brahmatejas* of the *rishis* cannot be successful alone to drive away the demons and then we have to use the bows of the *Kshatriyas*. Boycott is a war, where, according to Sri Aurobindo, we can apply both as its means. We have to use the bows of the *Kshatriyas* along with the *brahmatejas* of the *rishis* at the time of war and hence boycott agitation is truly called as war-time by him.

¹⁷⁰ .Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, ‘The Morality of Boycott’, p. 127

Whether boycott is to be considered as unjust or not in its answer Sri Aurobindo mentioned that war has to be violent in nature but it cannot be unjust. He claimed that a war, even being violent, can be unjust only if it is unprovoked e.g. if we attack someone without any proper reason to attack, then that violence is certainly unjust.¹⁷¹ But when we are provoked to use violence then it should not be considered unjust in nature, rather the just one. If one wants to attack us, according to Sri Aurobindo, then we are just to use violence as a means.¹⁷² Therefore the attack at Parliament by Bhagat Singh, Sukhdev and Rajguru in the protest of the notorious Jaliwanwala Bagh Murder case and the pre-planned murder of Lala Lajpat Rai could be considered as just to Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo beautifully used symbols to explain his position. Boycott is a war and it cannot be considered as unjust, even though violently aggressive in nature, because it seems just war or *dharma yudhha* to him. In this context let me try to concentrate on the notion of just war or *dharma yudhha* theory. Sri Aurobindo derived this concept from the *Mahabharata* where the war of *Kurukshetra* was known to be just war. But what is reason behind that? Arjuna, being a *Kshatriya*, had to be dominated by *rajas* as his essential quality. But he had an unusual *sattvic* bent of mind.¹⁷³ Hence he became very skeptical about the usefulness of the battle of *Kurukshetra* where he had to slaughter his own relatives or *ātmiyas* (*ātman* = soul and hence *ātmiyas* = persons connected to one's own 'ātman' or soul i.e. soul-

¹⁷¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Morality of Boycott", p. 127

¹⁷² Ibid, p. 127

¹⁷³ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, "Man and the Battle of Life", p. 53

relatives). He was doubtful about the massive killing of his relatives in the battle field. In this context comes the concept of just war. Sri Krishna quoted this battle as a just war or *dharma yudhha* where being a *Kshatriya*, Arjuna had to follow his *svadharma* and not to be overwhelmed by his *sattvic* quality rather to follow *rajasic* one. He condemned Arjuna in the *Gita* for showing reluctance to follow his own *svadharma*:

sahajam karma kaunteya sadoṣamapi na tyajet

sarvārambhā hi doṣeṇa dhūmenāgnirivāvṛtāḥ ||18/48||

[You should not reject the way of your *svadharma* even though it is fallen. Because just like fire surrounded by smoke every works are surrounded by *rajas*.]

And in other most famous verse of the *Gita* Sri Krishna advised Arjuna:

śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt

svadharme nidhanaṁ sreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ ||3/35||

[Following one's own nature or *dharma*, though imperfect, is still better than following other's nature or *dharma* even though seems perfect. Even dying in one's *svadharma* is far better as following others' *dharma* will naturally leads towards destruction and decay. Here *dharma* stands for *svadharma*.]

According to Sri Aurobindo we all have to be as courageous, as brave as the *Kshatriya*, not for our sake, but for the sake of our motherland. A true *Kshatriya* never gives up; he can even sacrifice his own life in the battle field. He never even thought to quite from it, even though the battle seems very much tough in nature. And boycott stood nothing else but a strong battle to Sri Aurobindo by whose help we can gain our independence or *swaraj*. Thus no question of quitting from the

battle-field seems relevant here. We all, according to him, have to achieve the morality of the *Kshatriya*,¹⁷⁴ so that the use of violence by the oppressor would not be able to break up the firmness of our mind and we can, being prepared in that way, could be able to go ahead in our path of achieving the national freedom, where the question of violence seems inapplicable. Boycott is a battle, and in battle-field the question of violence or non-violence is unnecessary. However, according to Sri Aurobindo, we cannot even have enough freedom to quit the battle of boycott as we are not the doers, rather just the instruments or tools used by. God himself is the doer, in his view, and he uses us as equipments for such a devastating war.¹⁷⁵

And what is the need of such battle? In the *Gita*, Lord Krishna himself preaches the great war of *Kurukshetra* as it seems mandatory for the well-being of India and its countrymen. Boycott, in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, has to be used as a *Kshatriya*'s bow in our hands at the time of Indian political movement.¹⁷⁶ Thus, according to Sri Aurobindo, this battle of *swadeshi* or boycott agitation also seemed necessary as per God's wish at the political context of the then India. Boycott movement is called by him as *dharma yudhha* as it is our *svadharma* to be indulged into this war. To discover the nature of *svadharma* Shri Krishna told to Arjuna in the *Gita*:

karmaṇyevādhikāraṣṭe mā phaleṣu kadācana

mā karmaphalāhetubhūr mā te saṅgo 'stvakarmaṇi ||2/47||

¹⁷⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 'The Morality of Boycott', p. 127

¹⁷⁵ Ibid, "The Present Situation", p. 661

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, "The Morality of Boycott", p. 127

[O Arjuna, you only have right in your work. You have to work without making any desire (*lokasamgraha*). Don't be the cause of the sufferings caused by the desire of *karmaphala*. However because you have to get rid of desire don't try to get rid of your actions also.]

Sri Aurobindo truly analyzed that the necessity of boycott as just war or *dharma yudhha* was to lying in the actual performance of our own *svadharma* as Arjuna had to follow his own *svadharma* on the battlefield of *Kurukshetra*. In the same way a follower of boycott had to perform his duty by remembering that it was his just war and he had to follow his *svadharma*.

Hence, according to Sri Aurobindo, whatever had been done in the pre-Independence India was all due to the supreme command of the Almighty.¹⁷⁷ We, the common Indians could become proud of being liberated from the hands of the British domination, even though the achievement of Indian independence in 1947 became possible only due to the master plan of God and also whatever we had lost and whatever we had gained in the name of boycott agitation at the time of Indian independence from 1905 to 1947, had also been done according to the Divine will as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. Thus, in his view, whatever had been done at the time of India's political movement was not according to the free will of any human being, rather according to the supreme will of the *Brahman*.¹⁷⁸ Thus whatever we have to do in the name of boycott agitation stands as a part of the divine plan by Sri

¹⁷⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 653

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 665

Aurobindo. Actually behind every theory of Sri Aurobindo the metaphysical touch is prevalent everywhere. His social-political thought is not at all an exception in this regard. And boycott as one of his most important political tool has to be allied with this inner metaphysical and spiritual touch hidden behind.

G. Spiritual Outlook of Boycott:

This boycott theory of Sri Aurobindo had a spiritual outlook hidden behind. Nationalism that time in India was itself compared with the worship of goddess Kali. Kali was accepted as the symbol of the motherland and hence nationalism seemed to the nationalists as nothing else than the worship of their Mother Nation. Thus Bankim's *Bhārat-māta* and Sri Aurobindo's motherland were not different than Kali. Swami Vivekananda clearly called goddess Kali as an inherent force or *prachanna sakti* behind everything belonging to this world. Sri Aurobindo called this *sakti* as the mother-nature or *Zeitgeist* who can be Kali and Krishna both.

Let me try to explain my position in this regard. Sri Aurobindo considered *Zeitgeist* as the mutual form of Kali and Krishna both. In his famous *Uttarpara Speech* he depicted the clear picture of his realization about the existence of Vasudeva among all. At the time of his confinement in Alipore jail he experienced Krishna in every living and non-living creatures.¹⁷⁹ This manifestation of Krishna is like his *līlā* in Sri Aurobindo's view.

What is the reason behind such realization? In his article "The Greatness of the Individual" in the book *The Ideal of the Karmayogin* Sri Aurobindo compared the

¹⁷⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "Uttarpara Speech", p. 78-79

all-pervasiveness of God with that of time.¹⁸⁰ Time is omnipotent and omniscient, so is God. Hence *Brahman* is none the less than time himself. Let me quote the *Gita* to explain it. In the *Gita* Sri Krishna told Arjuna:

Kālo 'smi lokakṣayakṛt pravṛddho lokān samāhartumiha pravṛttaḥ.

*ṛt'pi tvām na bhaviṣyanti sarve ye 'vasthitāḥ pratyānīkeṣu yodhāḥ ||*¹⁸¹

[I (Sri Krishna) am Time who waste and destroy the peoples; I have arisen in my might; I am here to swallow up the nations. Even without me all they shall not be, I even exist in between the men standing in the opposite squadrons.]

Hence from this above we can derive that *Brahman*, according to Sri Aurobindo, was manifested in the form of Krishna. In this way Sri Aurobindo took *Zeitgeist* in the form of Krishna. [*Zeitgeist*/Time/*Kāla* = Krishna]

However *Zeitgeist*, according to Sri Aurobindo, can appear in the form of Kali also.¹⁸² Kali, in his view, is not compared with Time as Krishna, but she is carrying time as her tool to create, sustain and destroy her foes so that she could fulfill her aim. From this description it cannot be illogical to draw that the power of Kali as 'aghaṭṇa-ghaṭṇana-paṭīyasī' (the woman who can make impossible possible) is beyond the limit of time.¹⁸³ Her power actually supersedes time. Time is just a power in the hands of Kali. When we accept *Zeitgeist* in this sense then we will

¹⁸⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, "The Greatness of the Individual", p. 56-57

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 56

¹⁸² Ibid, p. 58-59

¹⁸³ Ibid, p. 58

certainly accept him in the form of Kali. Even in his *Bhawani Mandir Manifesto* Sri Aurobindo clearly mentioned that Bhawani could be known as Kali, the goddess of pure *śakti* ('the Mother is manifested as the mother of Strength. She is pure Shakti.'¹⁸⁴). She had nested, according to him, her responsibility on the shoulders of her devotees to make India free. [*Zeitgeist/Mahākāla* = Kali]. In this above way we can discover that *Zeitgeist* can appear not only in the form of Krishna but also in the form of Kali.

But if we compare Sri Aurobindo's position with that of Bankim, then we have to accept that Bankim accepted mother-nation in the form of Kali. If we go through evaluating his *Ananda Math*, under whose influence Sri Aurobindo wrote *Bhawani Mandir Manifesto*, we will discover that his *Bhārat-māta* is none other than Kali. He never accepted the concept of Vasudeva as like Sri Aurobindo. Hence it could be seen that all of their basic tenets of the theory concerning nationalism is not so far away from each other in nature.

Now in the conclusion we can discuss with some objections against Aurobindian notion of boycott. A commonly raised objection against Sri Aurobindo's thesis of boycott is regarding its destructive feature. His theory of boycott, for this reason, is thought to advocate anarchism by critics. Boycott is actually an act of voluntary abstaining from using, buying or dealing with a person, organization or nation merely for political and economical causes. The notion of boycott has destructive character trait which could be seen at the time of American struggle for

¹⁸⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Bhawani Mandir", p. 61

independence where the Americans drawn teas in the harbor of Boston in the leadership of George Washington. This incidence is popularly known as Boston Tea Party in history. Nietzsche was considered as an anarchist by Sri Aurobindo as he accepted some features of anarchism like statelessness.¹⁸⁵

However Sri Aurobindo never accepted the destructive feature of boycott alone. Anarchists gave emphasis over the massive destruction of state control but Sri Aurobindo emphasized even over the constructive feature of boycott. His theory of boycott has two sides; both positive and negative. Boycott remains at the destructive side while *swadeshi* remains at the positive or constructive side of it. Along with the theory of economic boycott he assumed the necessity of developing the indigenous industries; with the theory of educational boycott he hypothesized the necessity of establishing the system of national education; with the theory of administrative boycott he suggested the necessity of establishing the national organization; with the theory of judicial boycott he postulated the necessity of developing the national arbitration courts; and as the sanction behind his entire boycott thesis he introduced the notion of social boycott. Therefore it will be quite absurd if we project Sri Aurobindo as guilty of introducing only the destructive feature of boycott. And for this above mentioned reason it will be unethical to call him anarchist.

Another question can arise – is Aurobindian thesis of boycott just a theory or it expands itself into the domain of practicality? The uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo’s

¹⁸⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Objective and Subjective Views of Life”, p. 56

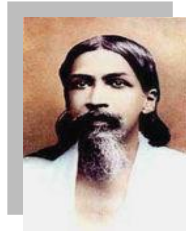
theory of boycott is that he never confined himself within the boundary of a theory but he rather tried to use it practically. He not only showed us the way to boycott but also the way to construct *swadeshi*. *Swadeshi* and boycott are indispensable parts in his view and like a true political leader he never confined boycott within the limits of its theoretical implications. Hence his theory regarding boycott is justifiably mentioned to fulfill the demands of ‘practical politics’ by Karan Singh.¹⁸⁶

Sri Aurobindo discovered spiritual overtone hidden behind the thesis of boycott. Boycott just like *swaraj* stands as nothing else but a divine tool in the hands of the Almighty to Sri Aurobindo. It is, in his view, due to the master plan of the Divine that boycott is specially designed for the Indians. India is culturally and spiritually very strong. Hence India is destined to be the spiritual guide of every other nation. Sri Aurobindo is well conscious of the fact and so he advocated the notion of Boycott so firmly. It is falsely thought that Gandhi is the first implementer of boycott in the context of Indian politics. Far away from his time Extremist Congress leaders preached for that. And Sri Aurobindo had a clearest idea of Boycott among all of them. Gandhi had no clear intention of applying social boycott, but Sri Aurobindo is much more far ahead of him.

Boycott was strongly thought, by Sri Aurobindo, as one of the weapons to bring *swaraj* or *swarajya*. *Swaraj* has to be made possible in reality by the help of boycott. But astonishingly the word ‘boycott’ is used in its spiritual sense also to

¹⁸⁶ Singh, Karan, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism: A Study of The Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh 1893-1910*, p. 174

him. However Sri Aurobindo's contribution was that he is the first person who could discover the Inherent spirituality hidden behind this political tool named boycott unlike other contemporary political leaders. It is true that Bankim and Viveknanda gave emphasis over the Hindu revivalism and discovered some amount of spiritual overtone hidden behind the thesis of nationalism in the context of Indian political movement, but none except Sri Aurobindo mentioned about the hidden spirituality behind a mere political tool named boycott. We should praise him for that. It is indeed the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo of discovering the inherent spiritual sense of boycott which seemed apparently political to other contemporary Indian politicians.



Third Chapter

The Resistance: Passive and Active

In the social-political theory of Sri Aurobindo as it has already been discussed according to some interpreters *swaraj* seemed to be the beginning of Life Divine and boycott as one of its important corollaries. In his spiritual dream of fulfilling the union with the Divine, he had taken the political path as he truly realized that for making our country wholly prepared for this spiritual destination, our first priority must be the attainment of its political freedom. Political liberty, in his opinion, has been interpreted to serve as the gateway for achieving the spiritual liberty.¹⁸⁷ From various writings of Sri Aurobindo it seemed that he had a firm belief over India's spiritual excellence and for making India as the spiritual guide of all other spiritually backward nations; it has to be made free from the shackles of its political servitude. Boycott is actually treated as an excellent weapon in this regard. In pre-independent India the urge for national freedom was inevitable. The British rulers had enforced several barbarous acts over its Indian citizens, e.g. the Bengal state Prisoners Act of 1818 to detain any Indian on the basis of suspicion without trial; the Prevention of Seditious Meetings Act of 1907 to stop political gatherings of

¹⁸⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Swaraj", p. 701

Indians; the Newspaper Act of 1908 along with the Press Act of 1910 to stop publishing seditious materials in Indian newspapers etc. The Rowlatt Act of 1919, Carlyle Circular of 1905, Indian Universities Act of 1904 etc also made the situation of judicial and educational systems of British India worsen. In this political background of India the preaching for passive and active resistances seemed mandatory. Sri Aurobindo's main aim was to achieve Indian liberty and resistance was thought to be the process of resisting the British government by gaining political liberty from their grasp.¹⁸⁸ Boycott movement (happened all over Bengal in 1905) is a tool while these two kinds of resistances were the means to achieve it. However in Sri Aurobindo's interpretation boycott is the highest form of passive resistance.¹⁸⁹ Passive resistance, in pre-independent India, was a way approached by the Moderate Congress leaders for achieving freedom in the form of colonial self-government from the grasp of the British government; whereas active resistance, according to Sri Aurobindo, was worshipped by the Nationalist leaders along with passive resistance for gaining complete independence of India. In fact, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, passive resistance as a method was taken up by the Moderates in the sense of prayer and petition theory in the context of India.¹⁹⁰ Karan Singh's explanation of resistance as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo is quite insightful in this connection.¹⁹¹ We may sum up it as follows:

¹⁸⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Shall India be Free?: The Loyalist Gospel", p. 300

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 101

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Obligations", p. 107

¹⁹¹ Singh, Karan, *Prophet of Indian Nationalism: A Study of The Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh 1893-1910*, p. 118-119

Firstly, Indian independence seemed the only desirable goal of Sri Aurobindo in the opinion of Karan Singh. For gaining independence, in his view, Sri Aurobindo was never shy of using the tool of resistance, be it active or passive in nature. Indian independence agitation was interpreted as war by Sri Aurobindo; hence he never wanted to compromise over the means of achieving freedom for India.

Secondly, Sri Aurobindo took the help of active violence at the initial stage of his political life as conceived by Karan Singh. *Bhavani Mandir Manifesto* was its prominent example.¹⁹² At his own residence at Maniktola his sheltering many aspiring freedom fighters is sign of his faith over the active resistance. His series of articles “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance” published in *Bande Mataram* from 11 to 23 April, 1907 under the general name of *New Thought* and the last article named “The Morality of Boycott”, produced as an exhibit in the Alipore Conspiracy case, are prominent examples of his deep faith over active resistance thesis.¹⁹³ All of these articles, which are cited as the proper examples of active resistance, are later incorporated in the book named *Bande Mataram*.

Thirdly, Sri Aurobindo never seemed as an impractical day dreamer to Karan Singh who thought that by making and importing small amounts of explosives, limited numbers of use of guerilla warfare and underground terrorist attacks we could de-thrown the two decades long British empire over India. On the contrary, Sri Aurobindo, being truly visionary than other contemporaries of his age, advocated

¹⁹² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Bhawani Mandir”, p. 61-74

¹⁹³ Ibid, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance”, p. 85 -128

passive resistance as a means of spreading broad, open and massive political uprising among Indian citizens by whose help we could outburst our hate, anger and distrust towards the foreign rulers. Passive resistance also, truly caught in his vision, can throw some amount of threat over the peaceful atmosphere of the British rule over India.

Fourthly, in the writings of Sri Aurobindo, as conceived by Karan Singh, passive and active both these kind of resistances are often called as defensive resistances, rather than offensive ones.¹⁹⁴ They both were thought to be the means used for our self-defense against the tyrannical rule of the British government at the then India by him. Passive and active resistances are considered to be the organs of resistance. Resistance, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, stands as the whole and these two as two important corollaries of it.

Fifthly, according to Karan Singh, resistance in the view of Sri Aurobindo stands not only as a means to resist but to protest. We have to protest, but not to resist, against unjust laws so that we can gain freedom.¹⁹⁵

There were several examples of passive and active resistances in the history of India. The examples of the passive resistance were the Anti Partition or *Swadeshi* movement of 1905; the *Satyagraha* movement of 1917-1918, the Non-cooperation movement of 1920-22; the Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-1934; and the Quit India movement of 1942-44. While the instances of active resistances were the

¹⁹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Conclusions", p. 119

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Necessity", p. 96

Muzzafarpur Bomb Case of 1907; the Ghadar Mutiny of 1914-17; the Christmas Day Plot of 1915; the Kakori Conspiracy Case of 1925; the Lahore Conspiracy Case or Assembly Bomb Case of 1929; the Chittagong Armory Raid case of 1930 and Azad-Hind-Fauz movement of 1944 the few among others.

A. Founder of Resistance Theory:

Who is the founder of passive resistance theory? In its answer, we can discover the name of Martin Luther King Junior in the international arena who used the term 'passive resistance' in the same sense of civil disobedience. But even before him Gandhiji was thought to be the founder of this concept in the form of *Satyagraha*, following Tolstoy and Ruskin, at South Africa in 1907. However before the appearance of Gandhi in the political arena at India Sri Aurobindo clearly wrote about the importance of passive resistance and these series of articles named "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance" was published under the general title of *New Thought* in the daily newspaper *Bande Mataram* from April 11 to 23, 1907. If we look at the Indian history then we will discover the application of the passive resistance theory started at the time of Bengal partition in 1905. At the time of anti-partition movement of Bengal in 1905 passive resistance took the shape of boycott and the credit was given to the Bengal leaders like Ashvmi Kumar Dutt, Surendra Nath Banerjee, Rabindranath Tagore, Dwijendralal Roy, Bipin Chandra Pal, Ananda Chandra Roy, Abdul Rasul, Maulavi Liaquat Hussain and numerous others

by Haridas Mukherjee and Uma Mukherjee in their book *India's Fight for Freedom*.¹⁹⁶

Who is the founder of active resistance thesis? Even though there were many instances of active resistances in World history, but only after the occurrence of famous French Revolution (1789) the doctrine of active resistance became much famous in the international arena. Voltaire, Rousseau etc philosophers were known to be the advocators of revolution at France. Perhaps they could be considered as the founders of active resistance, in the shape of revolution against the ruling French dynasty, in World history. While in India the credit of using active resistance in the forms of organized armed revolt and 'individual acts of assassination and terrorism' was given to the secret revolutionary groups of Bengal by Karan Singh.¹⁹⁷

B. Is Revolution synonymous with Resistance?

In this context arises another important question – are revolution and resistance synonymous ideas? The answer is no. It is mistakenly thought that both revolution and resistance are synonymous in nature. But actually they are not. Resistance is the previous step to revolution. Resistance means to resist some wrong doers passively or actively for doing wrong works. It can be used against the ruling government as well. Here our aim is to resist the wrong-doer from evil-doing. But revolution, on the contrary, is the means of showing distrust towards the government and

¹⁹⁶ As found in Singh, Karan, *The Prophet of Indian Nationalism: A Study of the Political Thought of Sri Aurobindo Ghosh 1893-1910*, p. 123

¹⁹⁷ Ibid, p. 110

overthrown it either by the means of violence or non-violence. It is a lengthy process as in India it took nearly two decades to succeed. Revolution is the process by whose means we can dethrone the tyranny of the ruling government and can start freshly as the republic or democracy. However in resistance attempts are made to resist the government from enforcing any unjust law. It is the initial stage for bringing the political change. But revolution is, on the contrary, the final stage towards the change. For bringing governmental change, resistance comes first than that of revolution. In this way resistance can be taken as the preparatory step to bring revolution.

We can easily show a profound distinction between these ideas and their respective practices. Resistance is the basis; and when the torture goes beyond the level of tolerance, then there needs revolution, not resistance. Resistance thus can be concluded truly as the basis of every kind of revolution.

C. Passive Resistance vs. Satyagraha: Gandhi:

Passive resistance is commonly thought to be *satyagraha* by most critics following Gandhi. However Gandhiji, following Tolstoy, declared it as ‘Soul-Force’.¹⁹⁸ Tolstoy’s book that changed the entire perception of Gandhi is named *Soul-force* where he first became introduced to the idea of passive resistance. In Gandhian explanation, *Satyagraha* is literally holding on to truth; hence it stands for Truth-force. Truth, according to him, is considered to be soul or spirit; hence it stands for

¹⁹⁸ Shrimad Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 179

soul-force.¹⁹⁹ It follows from that to Gandhi *Satyagraha* stands for soul-force instead of passive resistance. He was in this respect even very much influenced by Ruskin's *Unto This Last*.²⁰⁰

There is a fundamental difference, according to Gandhi, between both of the notions regarding passive resistance and *Satyagraha* (*Satyāgraha*). Passive resistance is not at all similar with that of *Satyagraha* to him. It is completely unjust to compare them both. Passive resisters are not *Satyagrahis* to him, even if people commonly think so. If we continue to believe that we are weak and helpless and therefore are offered with passive resistance, our resistance would never make us strong, and at the earliest opportunity we would give up passive resistance as, it seems to us, a weapon of the weak. On the other hand, in the view of Gandhi, if we are *Satyagrahi*, and are offered with *Satyagraha* believing ourselves to be strong, then two clear consequences result from it. First fostering the idea of strength, we grow stronger and stronger every day. With the increase in our strength, our *Satyagraha* too becomes more effective and we would never accept any opportunity to give it up. Secondly, according to Gandhiji, while there is no scope for spreading love even to the evil-doers in passive resistance, on the other hand hate (the opposite quality of love) has no place in *Satyagraha*.²⁰¹ While in passive resistance there is a scope for the use of arms when a suitable occasion arises, in *Satyagraha*

¹⁹⁹ Shrimad Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 180-181

²⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 534

²⁰¹ Ibid, p. 187

physical force is forbidden even in the most favorable circumstances. Passive resistance is often looked upon as a preparation for the use of violence or active resistance while *Satyagraha* can never be utilized as such. Passive resistance may be offered side by side with the use of arms, while *Satyagraha* and brutal forces, being negative to each other, can never go together at all. Even, in the view of Gandhi, *Satyagraha* can be offered to near and dear ones, unlike in the case of passive resistance. In *Satyagraha* there is no idea of injuring others, but in passive resistance we are aiming to harass and injure others. According to him, passive resistance postulates the conquest of the adversaries by harassing, mentally pressure-creating and injuring them, while a *Satyagrahi* never even dreamt for that and he injures only himself other than anyone else.²⁰² In this above way we can cite the difference of passive resistance theory as compared to Gandhi's doctrine of *Satyagraha*.

Many critics even take Gandhian theory of *Satyagraha* in the sense of civil disobedience²⁰³ and use both of these words synonymously. However civil disobedience stands for the breach of unmoral statutory or legal enactments by Gandhi.²⁰⁴ The term civil disobedience, according to him, first introduced by Thoreau, though he limited the term only in the case of breach to the revenue law or

²⁰² Shrimad Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 179

²⁰³ Civil disobedience refers to any act of process of public defiance of law or policy established by governmental authorities. The notion of 'disobedience' presupposes the concept of a norm to be disobeyed; especially a legal norm. [Sills, D. L., *International Encyclopedia of Social Science*, Volume 2, p. 473]

²⁰⁴ Shrimad Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 181

payment of taxes as civil disobedience stands as the practice of ‘resistance to the laws of a slave state’ to Thoreau.²⁰⁵ But till the coming of 1919 the term civil disobedience became limited only to the universal sense of contempt or breach of any kind of statutory and unmoral law. But if we go through the writings of Gandhiji then we will find out that the relation between *satyagraha* and civil disobedience is that of whole and part. *Satyagraha* is the whole and civil disobedience is a mere part of it. In an article “Press Statement on Suspension of Civil Disobedience” published in *The Hindu* on April, 1919 Gandhi claimed that *Satyagraha* stands as a large banyan tree and civil disobedience is just a tiny branch on it. *Satya* (truth) and *ahimsa* (non-violence) are the main trunk part of the tree from which civil disobedience take birth as a branch.²⁰⁶ Hence we should not compare between *Satyagraha* and civil disobedience as civil disobedience stands as the branch of *Satyagraha* according to Gandhi.²⁰⁷

Even though Gandhi never accepted the term ‘*Satyagraha*’ in the sense of passive resistance we could compare between Gandhian notions of passive resistance and *Satyagraha*. He clearly mentioned that even though in the case of passive resistance violence could be employed but its use should be prohibited in the case of *Satyagraha*. When passive resistance, in his view, is used without the application of violence only then passive resistance could be synonymous with that of *Satyagraha*.

²⁰⁵ Shrimad Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 181

²⁰⁶ Raghavan Iyer, (eds.), *The Essential Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, p. 332

²⁰⁷ Shrimad Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 182

According to Gandhi, brutal forces had absolutely no place in the Indian political movement. The passive resisters, in the sense of *Satyagrahis*, never used the physical forces at the time of Indian political agitation in the leadership of Gandhiji, but for this reason we could not claim them as the weaker class.²⁰⁸ The use of non-violence should be essential to a *satyagrahi*, but it is not considered as a sign of cowardice by him. Using arms is the antagonistic view of Gandhi as *Satyagraha* stood as a purely soul-force just opposite to the brutal forces. Whenever and to whatever extent we can use physical forces there remains very less possibility for the application of soul-force or *Satyagraha*. But we should, according to him, stick to the idea of passive resistance in the sense of soul-force wholeheartedly.²⁰⁹ However when the coercion will take fierce form then how could we employ *Satyagraha* or soul-force against our oppressors is a question that remains unanswered by Gandhi.

D. Sri Aurobindo on Passive Resistance:

According to Sri Aurobindo, passive resistance is the sole effective process, except that of active resistance, by which a nation like India can gather the strength of achieving political freedom. Indeed at the time of Indian freedom movement (1905-1947), armed revolts and secret revolutionary activities were being immensely helped by several passive resistance-oriented movements like the Anti-Partition movement of 1905 led by Bengal leaders and several other agitations, like the

²⁰⁸ Shrimad Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 179

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 179

Satyagraha movement of 1917-1918, Non-Cooperation movement of 1920-1922, Civil Disobedience movement of 1930-1934 and Quit India movement of 1942-1944 in the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi.

While describing the inevitability of passive resistance theory Sri Aurobindo observed that being wholly influenced by the English history of politics, the Indian political leaders of the nineteenth century accepted only two methods of organized resistance: the slow and steady method of agitation aiming at reformation of the existing governmental system (passive resistance); and the swift method of open struggle or armed revolt aiming at the development of its own free national government by destroying the existing one (in the sense of active resistance).²¹⁰ According to him, the implication of this slow agitation method would be possible for the British country-men, because they got at least some power to raise their voices for their inborn rights in England; which is completely impossible for the citizens of British-dominated India. Thus the second kind of political method namely open revolt seems much more appealing than the former and also very much applicable for the revival of the lost glory of ancient India. However the Moderate Congress leaders never preferred the second one. And, according to Sri Aurobindo, the first type of agitation is solely not applicable in Indian political context. Resistance, be it active or passive in nature, stands as appropriate means of attaining Indian freedom. He also preferred the use of passive resistance, except active resistance, as an immediate tool of boycott movement started since 1905 in

²¹⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Introduction", p. 89

India.²¹¹ It is really astonishing that even the Nationalist leaders, who were known to be the strong supporters of armed revolt, were in favor of accepting passive resistance as an essential part of their boycott agitation. However they were not at all in the mood of refuting the inherent necessity of the open struggle or armed revolt procedure.

Let me make the position of Sri Aurobindo clear. At the time of 1905, the three paths, left by our foreign rulers for us to follow, seemed essential for the resurgence of India – the ever most impossible looking path of prayer and petitioning; self-development by self-help as another uncertain way of success; and the path of organized resistance effective to destroy the ongoing tyrannical British system.²¹² By the process of petitioning, in his view, we can never reach towards the attainment of Indian freedom; by self-development method our goal of national liberty must not be obtained much easily. According to him we should take the path of organized resistance without whose help our dream will remain only in the utopian stage. But there are two different types of organised resistance whose support could be taken by us for achieving political liberty of India; they are, according to Sri Aurobindo, armed revolt or aggressive resistance and defensive resistance whether active or passive in nature.²¹³

²¹¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Necessity”, p. 95

²¹² Ibid, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Introduction”, p. 85

²¹³ Ibid, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Conclusions”, p. 119

However in Sri Aurobindo's opinion, passive resistance theory certainly has some limitations.²¹⁴ When the passive resistance movement of India, in his view, was not met with the barbarous tortures of the British administration, we, the Indian citizens passively, yet most reluctantly, accepted every legal action taken against us. When our political leaders were only restricted to make peaceful and armless meetings directed towards refuting the negligence of British bureaucracy; we never felt any urge to use violent means against it. At that stage of protest, the use of passive resistance was completely admirable in the political background of the then India. But when our voices were stopped by using repressive methods by the British government, then the necessity of armed revolt felt deeply by the Indian masses.²¹⁵ Actually from Sri Aurobindo's doctrine we get the clear idea that passive resistance stands as the gateway of active resistance. Passive resistance is applicable when the opponent is not employing his entire force; but against fiercely powerful opponent we should take the help of active resistance in his opinion. For that above reason Sri Aurobindo's theory of passive resistance is much more revolutionary in nature and is far ahead than his other contemporaries like Mahatma Gandhi.

E. Necessity of Passive Resistance:

Sri Aurobindo admitted the necessity of passive resistance by claiming it as an effective means except armed revolt as like the latter passive resistance can also throw a great threat towards the tyrannical administration and judiciary under the

²¹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Limits", p. 114

²¹⁵ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Limits", p. 114

foreign control.²¹⁶ Hence in the context of India he preferred also it. Even though both passive and active resistances aim at national liberty, they have an intrinsic difference in nature. The active resister tries to do some permanent harm to the Government by using violent means; whereas the passive resister actually restricting himself from doing any help to the ruling Government and thus at the end also bringing harm to it but passively. Passive resistance can stand for passive non-cooperation on the behalf of Sri Aurobindo; whereas active resistance is that kind of resistance where we have to be involved actively. Actually, passive resistance, in Sri Aurobindo's view, will be much more applicable where the administration depends on the moral supports of the masses; but in a country like India where the British administration even do not dare to stop the voices of its country-men by using violent tortures, there passive resistance seems not very much effective in nature. Hence the use of active resistance can seem mandatory in several extreme political phases. However Sri Aurobindo did not admit that in the arena of Indian politics active resistance in the apparent sense of aggressive resistance or armed revolt is at all utilized.²¹⁷

The passive resister in other countries could break the oppressive governmental laws and took essential steps for its prevention, e.g. the non-conformists in England refused to pay education tax or the Americans drowned the tea at the famous Boston dockyard. The British officials in India never considered the lives of their Indian subordinates valuable at all. The common Indians, according to our foreign

²¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Necessity", p. 95-96

²¹⁷ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Limits", p. 115

administrators, were spending their lives within the boundary of extreme poverty and nastiness and thus could be slaughtered at any time whenever seemed necessary for the sustenance of the British government. Hence when the same Indian subjects of foreign bureaucracy tried hard to gather their all forces united together and to shout in protest, then the dynasty ruling over India never took it open-mindedly. They truly realized it as a sign of the ending bell of their British dynasty in India. Scared by this fact, they consciously accepted the use of passive resistance in Indian political arena, by thinking it is not so useful; but not spared any little bit trial of using the active part of it.

Sri Aurobindo was in favor of using passive resistance as an important political doctrine in the nationalistic propaganda. He identified three necessities or canons of it.²¹⁸ The first necessity is that, passive resistance aims at making a governmental law unworkable by showing general and organized disobedience towards it. The aggressive type of resistance gives its full force on destroying the foreign administrative laws by using violence. On the contrary, according to Sri Aurobindo, the first canon of passive resistance is that it aims at breaking the unjust coercive laws by showing peaceful demonstration.²¹⁹ The second canon of passive resistance, acceptable to both the Extremists and Moderates, is that to resist the unjust coercive laws is not just justified in nature but is a sense of duty towards our motherland. Thus Sri Aurobindo truly evaluated that the inward sense of passive

²¹⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Obligations", p. 109-112

²¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 110

resistance in its second canon stood not as a peaceful demonstration, rather as an essential duty to the nation in the political turmoil of the then India.²²⁰ The third canon is extremely important in Sri Aurobindo's doctrine as well as in Indian political context. Here Sri Aurobindo explained the usefulness of social boycott in this regard. It seemed completely legitimate and indispensable to him in nature in the political context of the then India. For the instant success of passive resistance agitation, we have to boycott not only foreign goods, but also the persons who used foreign goods. Simply by banning foreign goods we cannot stop its usage. For stopping its usage, we need to stop those people who are in favor of using it. If we ban the use of foreign goods in India, they will export these goods from abroad. So to stop the usage of foreign goods completely, as suggested by Sri Aurobindo, we have to socially boycott these rich persons favoring the use of foreign goods from attending any social ceremony, ritual and political meeting.²²¹ Any kind of bonding with them should be strictly banned. Even the shop-keepers have to refuse to supply them daily accommodations. Hence the third canon of passive resistance seems most important among others. In this regard we find out that, Sri Aurobindo tried to employ the strict sense of boycott here. However social boycott can be violent in nature. It is true that social boycott is conceived generally as non-violent; but if for showing protest against anybody or to restrict him from attending any political or social meeting we use even a small amount of force, then it will naturally be converted into the violent or active form of resistance. However Sri Aurobindo was

²²⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Obligations", p. 111

²²¹ *Ibid*, p. 112

totally convinced to use social boycott, even with such risk, against the guilty persons of treason towards our nation.

F. Criteria of Passive Resister: Gandhi vs. Aurobindo:

A passive resister has numerous criterions to be fulfilled. However in this context we have to go through the doctrines of Gandhi and Aurobindo.

- **Similarity of Gandhi and Aurobindo:**

What are the basic criteria of a passive resister? A passive resister as viewed by Sri Aurobindo: 1) must be prepared to break an unjust law by taking any kind of legal action living within the boundary of governmental law and administration; 2) must be at once ready to disobey the unjust and coercive executive orders; 3) must be prepared to boycott socially all guilty persons of showing deliberate signs of disobedience to the nation which hampers the intrinsic integrity of India; and most importantly 4) should be prepared to sacrifice even his own life for the sake of the mother-Nation.²²² In this context we can discover the similarity of his doctrine with that of Mahatma Gandhi. The criteria of a passive resister in the sense of *Satyagrahi*, according to Gandhi, are fourfold – 1. A *Satyagrahi* or a civil resister will show no anger. 2. He has to suffer the anger of the opponent. 3. He will face assaults from the opponent, but never retaliate. 4. A civil resister will never insult his opponent and therefore also not take part in violence, rather should strictly

²²² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Bhwani Mandir: Appendix”, p. 72-74

follow the path of non-violence.²²³ The criterion of passive resister given by Sri Aurobindo was also accepted by Gandhi.

- **Dissimilarity of Gandhi and Aurobindo:**

Gandhiji was in favor of using *Satyagraha* (in the sense of passive resistance) on the strict basis of *ahimsa* or non-violence which was certainly overruled by Sri Aurobindo. Unlike Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo declared that, when the ultimate limits of pressures and coercions would be expanded in the devastating way which could be capable to destroy our national lives, then we have left no other option than to choose the path of active resistance; and it should be followed strictly as our only holy duty towards motherland. Till then the method of passive resistance is acceptable to him.²²⁴ However, according to Sri Aurobindo, not only passive resistance, but also the active one may be sometimes considered as a form of defensive resistance. For example, when Indians took the path of revolution in the protest of the brutal murder of Lala Lajpat Rai and the Jalian Wala Bagh firing case, then their move must not be considered as a violent or offensive kind of resistance, rather an actual sign of self-defense; as it is not at all an offense to show the outrage of inner anger in this way. But the uncanny murder of some Mr. Rand and even the popular Mrs. and Ms. Kennedy Murder case should be referred as a proper instance of offensive resistance. Hence, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, when our advocacy of passive resistance is understood as a symbol of our national cowardice by our

²²³ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume Six: The Voice of Truth, p. 187-189

²²⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Limits”, p. 114

opponents, then it will be much wise to take the way of active resistance. Whenever we are dominated and our voices are choked by others, then we are completely free to use active resistance as an effective tool. Sri Aurobindo never considered passive resistance as the ultimate tool to bring Indian Independence like Gandhi. Gandhiji, on the contrary, never accepted the use of active resistance in the context of Indian politics at all as to him nonviolence is superior to violence.²²⁵

G. Gandhi on Active Resistance:

Gandhi was never in favor of using violence as a means of achieving freedom instead he preferred nonviolence as a means of it.²²⁶ Indian independence cannot be obtained by the means of armed revolt as appeared to him. In this context he never distinguished between the words ‘armed revolt’ and ‘active resistance’ like Sri Aurobindo. To him, both of them are synonymous in nature as both have some amount of violence factor inherent within. But actually in armed revolt we are using arms as a means of revolution whereas in active resistance we are resisting the oppressor forcefully. Active resistance, for its dependency over violence or *himsa* which is opposite to the notion of non-violence or *ahimsa*, never gained acceptance in Gandhian thesis. But his thesis is quite opposite to Sri Aurobindo as Sri Aurobindo while describing the dissimilarity between armed revolt and active resistance very skillfully involved the question of provocation.²²⁷

²²⁵ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume Six: The Voice of Truth, p. 175

²²⁶ Ibid, p. 157

²²⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Morality of Boycott”, p. 127

Gandhi is totally against the use of violence in the name of active resistance. He was always in favor of employing soul-force or *Satyagraha* instead of active resistance or body-force.²²⁸ He believed in the existence of God even within the body of our adversaries so if we resist him actively, via the means of violence, then actually, according to Gandhi, we are disrespecting the inner divinity of him.²²⁹ Passive resistance, in the opinion of Gandhi, as soul-force will appeal to the soul of his adversaries but that is certainly not applicable in the case of active resistance. Even though he preferred to use violence than to be known as coward,²³⁰ he never accepted the use of active resistance for its dependency over violence. In this way we can derive that the reasoning behind Mahatma Gandhi's rejection of active violence actually lies in his advocacy of soul-force.

H. Sri Aurobindo on Active Resistance:

Sri Aurobindo demonstrated the necessity of active resistance as the immediate means of attaining Indian freedom. In my opinion, if we used this tool efficiently at the time of Indian politics before 1947, then we did not need to wait for so long time to get independence. In *Kurukshetra*, Lord Krishna encouraged Arjuna to be indulged into the bloody war against his brothers. In the same way the Indians, according to Sri Aurobindo, have to be indulged into the war of Indian

²²⁸ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume Six: The Voice of Truth, p. 157

²²⁹ Ibid, p. 113

²³⁰ Ibid, p. 176

independence and in this context we should not raise any question regarding the use of active resistance.²³¹

The insight of Sri Aurobindo's thesis regarding active resistance lies here that he never condemned the use of active resistance for the use of violence in the sense of armed revolt or massive assassinations of the opposite party. Armed revolt is not at all synonymous with active resistance. According to Sri Aurobindo, armed revolt is that type of revolution which started even though unprovoked, whereas active resistance is still a part of defensive resistance. As the name shows, defensive resistance tries to resist any torture taken place over the suffered persons by defensive means. Active resistance along with the passive resistance, according to him, is known to be the corollaries of that defensive resistance. Let me make the position clear. When someone is attacked by some outsider to death, then he can resist him in two ways, passively and also actively. When the sufferer tries to resist him in bare hands then he is using the passive way of resistance. But when the sufferer try to resist the attacker with force then the means has been changed into the active resistance. However both of them are truly categorized as the defensive kind of resistance by Sri Aurobindo.²³² Armed revolt uses violence as an instrument even though it is unprovoked. The protest of Sushil Pal after being beaten is provoked by the tortures of the British army, thus it is an example of active resistance. But the murder of Mrs. and Miss Kennedy instead of Kingsford by Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose is unprovoked; hence it is a true instance of

²³¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Morality of Boycott", p. 127

²³² Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Conclusion", p. 119

armed revolt. The difference between armed revolt and active resistance rests in the question of provocation as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.

According to Sri Aurobindo, active resistance is nothing else but a kind of defensive resistance form; where we have to resist actively the blows given by our enemies by using violence. In this context, his thesis is somewhat different than that of Gandhi as the latter failed to differentiate between active resistance and armed revolt. Actually the uniqueness of Aurobindian thesis of active resistance lies in its acceptance as defensive resistance instead of aggressive resistance or armed revolt as following critics.

I. Defensive vs. Aggressive Resistance: Aurobindo:

The inherent difference between defensive resistance and aggressive resistance is somewhat very clear in nature. When, according to Sri Aurobindo, we are attacked by goons and we try to protect our lives, either by using arms or empty handed, then the method taken is known to be the defensive kind of resistance. And when we attack someone else even though unprovoked then this method is known to be aggressive kind of resistance. The inherent difference between both of them is lying within the question of provocation. If someone provokes you to be violent then also it has to be considered by Sri Aurobindo as defensive kind of resistance, instead of aggressive one.²³³

The defensive resistance at the very beginning of the Indian political movement remained passive in nature and whenever dominated by coercive rules, enacted by

²³³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Morality of Boycott", p. 125

the ruling British government, it immediately took the necessary forms of active resistance. Now the offensive kind of resistance could be considered as illegal by the ruling government, but the defensive one, whether passive or active, must not be limited within the boundary of illegality. Because every person is allowed to protect or defend himself, the means, violent or non-violent, does not matter at all in this context. In Sri Aurobindo's view, our struggle, using passive resistance as means, should be confined within the level of Boycott. Non-payment of Taxes is its upper limit which must not be reached by us. Because it is quite illegal in spirit and leads us towards a direct face to face agitation with the British laws. Here by not paying governmental taxes imposed on us, we, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, are breaking the governmental rules directly and hence it could be considered as offensive resistance.²³⁴ Active resistance was also considered by the British government as illegal breach of conduct on the behalf of their Indian subjects but to Sri Aurobindo it appeared just as a means of self-protection.

In this way Sri Aurobindo categorized active resistance within the sphere of defensive resistance based on the question of provocation. Actually there is no difference between defensive and aggressive kinds of resistances in nature as both of them were included within the organized resistance by Sri Aurobindo.²³⁵ As suggested by him, the use of this kind of organized resistance was truly mandatory in the political backdrop of the then India and there should be no hesitation of using this method by Indians for achieving their political freedom. In his view, no means

²³⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 105

²³⁵ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Introduction", p. 89

should be left untouched us, be it defensive resistance or the offensive resistance, at the time of political crisis.

J. Armed Revolt vs. Active Resistance: Reasons given by Sri Aurobindo:

Active resistance is falsely interpreted as armed revolt by most critics. But Sri Aurobindo superbly differentiated between both of them. The difference between active resistance and armed revolt are as follows:

Firstly, armed revolt is considered by him as the aggressive kind of resistance. Armed revolt is related to massive assassinations of our opponents which is necessarily aggressive in nature. But active resistance is known to be defensive resistance to Sri Aurobindo as we can use this method only for defending us. There is no aggression hidden behind the concept of active resistance. In active resistance we are not aggressive with our demands, but we can resist the on-going tortures on us by taking the help of violent means.²³⁶ If someone is attacking us and we are trying to protect our lives from them, then it should be considered as an example of defensive resistance, instead of aggressive one. In active resistance our main aim is to resist the wrong-doer even if by using violence as a tool of protection.

Secondly, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, we are not using violence as our ultimate means in the case of active resistance. But in the case of armed revolt we have to use violence as the ultimate means where massive bloodshed is mandatory. The attack over Kennedy ladies by Prafulla Chaki and Khudiram Bose in the

²³⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: its Limits", p. 115

misconception of Kingsford could be considered as the proper example of armed revolt. The killing of Mr. Rand was also considered as an example of armed revolt by him. But even after telling this Sri Aurobindo clearly claimed that there are not very much instances of armed revolt in the context of pre-independent India.²³⁷ Let me make the position clear. In active resistance we try to resist the oppressor actively with using violence as a tool; whereas in armed revolt we use violence as the only means of achieving freedom. In this second method we are not resisting torture by violence but are using violence as a means of revolution.

Thirdly, armed revolt seems unprovoked to Sri Aurobindo; it is dependent upon the natural will of the revolutionaries. However the use of active resistance, in his view, is always provoked by the wrong-doers.²³⁸ When Indians burnt foreign cloths to show protest against the British Trade rule, then it could be considered as the true example of active resistance provoked by the marketing policy of our foreign rulers. But when we took the help of the secret revolutionary societies and tried to kill several British officials, then these kinds of attacks were actually unprovoked, and were the best suited instances of armed revolt.

These differences of active resistance and armed revolt are essential for understanding the true nature of active resistance thesis as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. However the line of difference is not very easy to grasp because both of them use violence and arms as the inseparable tools. They can be distinguished only in the context of provocation. Briefly speaking, following Sri Aurobindo we can say

²³⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: its Limits", p. 115

²³⁸ Ibid, "The Morality of Boycott", p. 127

that the method which is provoked is active resistance and that which is not is armed revolt.

K. Is Violence necessary for Active Resistance?

In the opinion of the critics violence plays an extremely necessary part in the context of active resistance. Even Gandhiji also made the same mistake. According to him, active resistance is nothing but an unnecessary means of using violence; here the question of provocation is not applicable. Whether we try to resist the oppressor with the help of violence or attack him suddenly with violence both are known to be the examples of active resistances to Gandhi. Here the use of violence is inherent. But the problem is that he failed to draw the essential difference between active resistance and armed revolt. However Sri Aurobindo truly envisioned that in the above mentioned examples the first one is an example of active resistance, whereas the second one is that of armed revolt. To him, the question of aggression is utterly unnecessary in the context of active resistance.²³⁹

In active resistance, we have to resist the oppressor so that we can defend ourselves with violence.

Violence is necessary ingredient of active resistance but for this, in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, it could not be considered as aggressive in nature. The Indian freedom movement stands as a war to him and in war we have to take the help of violence and aggression. Aggression is unjust when seems unprovoked to him, but in the context of Indian independence the violence is completely provoked by the

²³⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, 'The Morality of Boycott', p. 127

tyrannical British rule. Indeed the tyrannical British rule over India for two decades made the Indians bound to apply active resistance. In war time, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, we have to take the help of violence. We have to take the help of active resistance in war as it is like ‘the bow of the Kshatriya’ as described by Sri Aurobindo following the *Gita*.²⁴⁰ Active resistance is very soulfully compared with the *Kshatriya*’s bow by him. A *Kshatriya* has to use his bow for winning the battle and hence just like a *Kshatriya* we have to use active resistance as our bow in our fight against British government for gaining Indian political liberty. Thus, clearly speaking, when passive resistance fails, we have to employ active resistance as a means. Active resistance is the ultimate device for achieving Indian political liberty whenever passive resistance fails to fulfill its goal. Achieving the goal of political liberty seemed to him as the necessity of that time in India after 1905. The question of violence seemed completely irrelevant to him in the context of the then India.

L. Difference of Active and Passive Resistances:

Passive and active resistances are somewhat similar to each other. Both of them are considered as defensive resistance in Sri Aurobindo’s view. Defensive resistance is that by whose help we have to resist the ongoing oppression taken place on us by others. In passive resistance we have to resist the offender passively; while in active resistance we have to resist the offender actively. In passive resistance we are using boycott, social non-cooperation, non-payment of taxes, *dharnā*, picketing, *bandh*

²⁴⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Conclusions”, p. 122

etc. as the immediate means. Active resistance, on the contrary, is to use force to save us from being suffered.

Within the range of passive resistance, boycott has come as its first principle.²⁴¹ Non-payment of taxes is also another supreme kind of passive resistance. In the context of West, non-payment of taxes is the most relevant kind of passive resistance. The English people used the technique of refusal to pay taxes as the efficient means of attaining success in their freedom movement. The objective of their passive resistance was not to bring the Government to its knees, but to throw out the conservative Government at the next elections. They had the power of vote and could overthrow any chance of injustice by the help of voting. In India we had faced somewhat different political circumstance although the resistance movement of the American colonists were much parallel with Indian politics. Like us the Americans also resisted oppression with the weapon of boycott. They were not wholly dependent on England and had their own legislatures in local affairs; so they had neither an occasion to extend the boycott to all departments of national life nor to attempt a general policy of national self-development. Their boycott was limited to British goods; however in Indian context of 1905 we had to extend the use of boycott in its five parts – economic, administrative, political, judicial and social. The Americans had however to go beyond the boycott and refuse to pay the taxes imposed on them against their will. But when they offered the ultimatum to the mother country i.e. England and met with tremendous torture from their British

²⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods”, p. 101

counter-parts, then they had no other option left than to prepare to struggle for independence, supported by armed revolt. Here again there is a material difference from Indian conditions. In India the common Indians were never been prepared to use armed revolt as a means of gaining Indian independence. The Indian politicians were never in favor of armed revolt, rather than that of passive resistance. However in the view of Sri Aurobindo, we have to use active resistance as an immediate means of achieving political freedom. Passive resistance is not admissible as an ultimate means to snatch freedom from the British government to him. The motto of the Indian political freedom movement has not to be, as conceived by him, ‘no representation, no taxation’, rather ‘no control, no assistance’.²⁴²

According to Sri Aurobindo, there is no such difference between passive and active resistance as they both are defensive kind of resistance. He drew our attention towards the significance of both these resistances as just tools to snatch the political freedom of India from the hands of the foreign rulers, but the techniques are different. In passive resistance we have to remain passive for the implication of coercive British laws whereas in active resistance we have to take the responsibility to break them forcefully. In passive resistance, as conceived by him, we have to show our anger and distrust in non-violent and composed format; while in active resistance, to resist the oppression, we have to attack the oppressors violently.²⁴³ But both of these resistances are actually executed for ensuring our own security and they are rightly declared as defensive kinds of resistance by Sri Aurobindo.

²⁴² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods”, p. 106

²⁴³ *Ibid* , p. 101

In the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, our defensive resistance, in the form of passive resistance, at the very beginning remains passive in nature and whenever dominated by coercive rules, it immediately took the necessary forms of active resistance. Now the offensive kind of resistance could be considered as illegal by ruling government, but the defensive one, whether passive or active, must not be limited within the boundary of illegality. The defensive resistance should be legal in nature. Because every person is allowed to protect or defend himself, the means, violent or non-violent, does not matter at all in this context. In Sri Aurobindo's view, our struggle should be confined within the level of Boycott. Non-payment of Taxes is its upper limit which must not be reached by us. Because, according to him, it is quite illegal in spirit and leads us towards a direct face to face agitation with the British laws.²⁴⁴ Hence, as following Sri Aurobindo we have to understand that there is no such strong line of difference between these two types of resistances as the limit of coercion will determine whether we take the path of passive or active resistances.

M. Spiritual outlook of Resistance:

Our most sacred duty, according to Sri Aurobindo, is to win over the liberty of India by whatever means we employ. Passive along with active resistances are just the means of achieving it. Sri Aurobindo symbolically called the work of national freedom movement as a *yajña* and the foreign masters as *rakshas (rākṣas)* and, just as we find in ancient scriptures, to drive away the demons ancient *rishis (ṛṣis)* had performed *yajñas*; we, the Indians, to drive away foreigners out of our country have

²⁴⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Its Methods", p. 105

to perform the holy *yajña* of freedom movement. The question about its means, whether violent or non-violent, active or passive, is irrelevant in this regards.²⁴⁵ In Sri Aurobindo's view, if we consider national movement as a great and holy *yajña*, then passive resistance should stand for the symbol of peaceful demonstration of *brahmatejas* of the passive resisters, who can be compared with their ancestor *rishis* in this regard.

However we cannot look down upon the importance of active resistance in this regard. In his view, when the battle took a fierce form, then even the greatest *rishis*, in the sense of passive resisters, has to take the help of the bow of the *Kshatriya* (*Kṣatriya*). Greatest possible number of sacrifices leading by the *brahmatejas* of the *rishis* or passive resisters cannot always destroy the demons or foreign oppressors at any fierce battle. Therefore we should employ the bow of the Kshatriya and this bow of the Kshatriya may take the accurate form of active resistance.²⁴⁶ He mentioned that we can use active resistance as a quite effective means only when use of passive resistance seems the utmost failure. For him, to impose Brahmanical ideal of silent suffering in the context of politics seemed to preach for *varṇasaṅkara* as politics is the field for the Kshatriyas.²⁴⁷ Here he used the term *varṇasaṅkara* in the sense of confusion regarding following one's own *svadharma* which will bring gradual death and decay of the society.

²⁴⁵ Sri Aurobindo. *Bande Mataram*, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Conclusions", p. 122

²⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 122

²⁴⁷ Ibid, "The Morality of Boycott", p. 125

His original goal was to attain Indian independence and the tools used in this endeavor do not matter at all. But the goal is not at all fulfilled by the achievement of India's political freedom. In his view, Indian political independence is just a gateway to lead towards the spiritual independence.²⁴⁸ Spiritual gateway is an auspicious gateway which can be opened only when we would reach the destination of attaining the political liberty. But unfortunately even though we have got our political liberty for around 50 years, we are not capable to reach towards the goal of spiritual liberty as dreamt by Sri Aurobindo.

N. Inherent Philosophy behind Resistance:

Sri Aurobindo's attitude was that of Political *Vedantism*, as according to him 'Vedantism accepts no distinction of true or false religions, but considers only what will lead more or less surely, more or less quickly to *mokṣa*, spiritual emancipation and the realisation of the Divinity within.'²⁴⁹ Sri Aurobindo, in the same way like *Vedantism*, gave emphasis over the discovery of our inner divinity and the attainment of *mokṣa* which took the form of collective salvation to him. Hence we can properly compare his attitude with that of Political *Vedantism*. Freedom of indivisible India is the gateway of this divine realization of the desired spiritual emancipation.²⁵⁰ Passive and active resistances have to be considered as either the final methods of such realization or the pathways of preparation for the ultimate

²⁴⁸ Sri Aurobindo. *Bande Mataram*, "Swaraj", p. 701

²⁴⁹ Ibid, "The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Conclusions", p. 122

²⁵⁰ Ibid, "Swaraj", p. 701

gain of this spiritual aim through *sādhanā*. As sooner as we practice them, in Sri Aurobindo's view, we may be capable to reach nearer to our inborn dream of collective salvation by making our life Life Divine, by the means of attainment of national liberty. The most aspiring fact is that this endeavor is started since 1950 and as Sri Aurobindo believed we can soon be able to achieve the highest stage of Life Divine through the process of Ascent towards the *Sachchidanada*.

According to Sri Aurobindo, everything belonging in this world is the mere manifestation of God. Hence, in his opinion, the Supreme belongs to everything and everything belongs to him.²⁵¹ Thus *swaraj* seems to him as the cry of the Almighty and resistance is the Divine path. The common Indians, in his view, have to follow the supreme command of the Divine. For this reason Aurobindian thesis of resistance can be compared with the divine command theory by the critics.

In this context let us try to understand the divine command theory so that we can draw comparison of it with that of Sri Aurobindo. Divine command theory is a very ancient theory in its form. According to this theory an action is morally good if it is commanded by god. This is known to be a meta-ethical theory. It was preached by Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas etc philosophers of the Middle Age Europe when the control of Church was farfetched.

Divine command theory is often refuted by an argument named as Euthyphro dilemma. This argument is named after Plato's dialogue Euthyphro (the dialogue in which this criticism has its origin). This dilemma begins with a question: are all

²⁵¹ Sri Aurobindo. *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 660

morally good acts willed by God just because they are morally good or they are morally good just because they are willed by God? If we accept the first option then we are bound to face the independence problem. That means if morally good acts are willed by God just because they are morally good, then their morally good characteristic must be independent of God's will power. God's will is irrelevant for making the morally good acts actually morally good. And if we accept the second options, then we have to face three problems, namely arbitrariness problem, emptiness problem and the problem of abhorrent commands one by one. The first problem arises when it seems that the divine command theory is the basis of morality but eventually itself not sanctioned by morality. The morally good acts are sanctioned by God, not by morality. So the seemingly morally good commands can be arbitrary commands like 'brush in the morning'. No morally arbitrary command can be the basis of morality (arbitrariness problem). The second problem is that 'God is good' or 'God's commands are good' etc sentences can be regarded as empty tautologies like 'God acts in accordance with his commands' because God's goodness has to be dependent upon the enforcement of morally good acts. Hence this sentence actually seems empty in nature (emptiness problem). The third problem lies in that whatever God can say has to be accepted as morally good acts. Thus if God said that cruelty and violence are good then we have to consider the acts of cruelty and violence as morally good acts (problem of abhorrent commands).

Sri Aurobindo's profound faith over spirituality helped him to consider that even behind our resistance agitation there remains the will of *Sachchidanada*, be it passive or active in nature. In this way we can consider that the driving force behind

his preaching for the Indian independence is none other than God himself.²⁵² This discovery of similarity is not at all very much astonishing in nature as he was deeply influenced by the European history and social-cultural thoughts along with that of Indian or Asian. Behind his social-political theory regarding resistance the influence of spirituality is always predominant. His ultimate surrender in front of Supreme is perhaps responsible for such view-point. In my view his over emphasis on God's mission behind the occurrence of the Indian independence movement leads critics to this conclusion.

At the concluding portion I am trying to refute some objections arising against Aurobindian theory of resistance. It is a common raised objection against Sri Aurobindo's thesis regarding resistance that it aims at anarchism and terrorism. Sri Aurobindo's emphasis over violence as the means of active resistance is the reason behind such misconception. Anarchism tends to reject the existence of state as a repressive organ in the hands of its governing power. The follower of this thesis advocated for the self-governed societies based on voluntary institutions which are often called as the stateless societies. It is true that like an anarchist Sri Aurobindo never accepted the notion of state as state, even to him, stands as a machine of torture.²⁵³ Marx also rejected the idea of state for the same reason. But for that reason it will be quite unjust if we claim that Sri Aurobindo is actually an anarchist. He clearly sought to rule out the British rulers from India; but, on the other hand, advocated for establishing a national rule over it. Sri Aurobindo rejected the idea of

²⁵² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 665

²⁵³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "The Inadequacy of the State Idea", p. 28

state but accepted the idea of nation-state with soul factor. Hence it is quite absurd to call him as anarchist.

The same thing could be said when Sri Aurobindo was considered as a terrorist by critics. His emphasis over resistance leads the critics to believe that he is actually a believer in terrorism. Peter Heehs in his book *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism* considered Sri Aurobindo as a terrorist because the revolutionary movement in Bengal led by Sri Aurobindo and his associates against the British regime (1906-1910) as none the less but a revolutionary terrorism. According to Heehs, early nationalist writers intentionally avoided the term ‘terrorism’ and replaced it with the term ‘militant nationalism’ in the sense of an armed uprising throughout the country which, according to him, never took place in reality in Indian territory.²⁵⁴ Heehs in his book mentioned that Sri Aurobindo was in favor of forming secret revolutionary societies in Bengal with the assistance from outside which helped him to derive the conclusion regarding Sri Aurobindo’s direct association with the terrorist activities.²⁵⁵ The preaching for armed insurrection by Sri Aurobindo seemed to be the symbol of supporting terrorism to him. However his criticism seems absurd. Now it is a doubtless fact that Sri Aurobindo had relation with the secret revolutionary societies of Bengal, namely Jugantar Dal and Anushilan Samiti. But for this it will not be relevant to call Sri Aurobindo as a terrorist. Terrorism is generally associated with the deliberate and senseless killing of innocent people. Sri Aurobindo as well as Bengal revolutionaries never accepted

²⁵⁴ Heehs, Peter, *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History*, p. 12

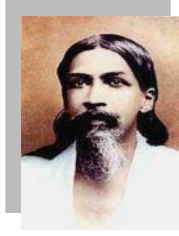
²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 4

the meaningless massive killing in the name of terrorism. Even the muzzafarpur bomb case, where Khudiram Bose and Prafulla Chaki were convicted guilty of killing two innocent ladies, was actually a mistake of identification. They tried to kill Magistrate Kinsford instead of Mrs Kennedy and Ms. Kennedy. Except this case there were no such big mistakes done by the revolutionaries of Bengal. Unnecessary bloodsheds were never encouraged by the Bengal revolutionaries. So for that reason it will be quite unjust to consider Sri Aurobindo as a terrorist.

Actually the reason behind Sri Aurobindo's perching for resistance is somewhat spiritual in nature. He was indeed indulged into the political agitation of Indian independence. However his intention behind the advocacy of resistance thesis bears the spiritual overtone like all his other political theories. According to Sri Aurobindo, resistance is not separate from the political plan of the Divine. With *swaraj* and boycott it is also served as another important political tool in the hands of the Almighty in Sri Aurobindo's doctrine. Actually the master plan of the Supreme is related to achieve Indian freedom by means of applying any instrument lying in hands. Passive resistance is much popular among both of the resistance thesis. Active resistance is not unpopular at all but it is falsely thought to be similar with that of armed revolt. Passive resistance is considered to be made popular by Gandhi in the form of *Satyagraha*. Even though far before Gandhi's arrival in the arena of Indian politics, Sri Aurobindo declared his clear concept about resistance, whether passive or active. His thesis never declined the use of active resistance. On the contrary he clearly and firmly praised both of the resistances as they both, due to the master plan of the Almighty, should serve to make India politically free and

spiritually supreme of all. Political freedom stands as just the gateway to achieve the spiritual supremacy to him,²⁵⁶ and in this endeavor passive resistance and active resistance serve their best. The uniqueness of Aurobindian thesis of resistance lies actually in accepting the spiritual overtone behind it.

²⁵⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Swaraj", p. 701



Fourth Chapter

The Theory of National Education

The definition of education is a very debatable concept about which the agreement has to be yet established. Generally we denote by the word ‘education’ the system of education received by us during our school and college days. But is this denotation appropriate? If yes, then education will stand just for bookish knowledge encouraged by our traditional educational institutes. Education certainly does not mean that. In its true sense, education should be that training, both mental and physical, of the children, which will enable them to reveal their internal capabilities as well as introduce them with the world of knowledge. According to Swami Vivekananda, by which education we learn to control and dominate our moral wills and to limit their speed of mind completely that education should be considered as the proper kind of education.²⁵⁷ Education in its true sense will encourage the pupils not only to learn from books, but also from nature. Because a person, who does not believe that nature is the best teacher of a child, is actually rejecting one of the most significant principles of education. A child, detached from the nature, is unable to utilize his bookish information due to lack of appropriate training. In books he will

²⁵⁷ Swami Vivekananda, *Swami Vivekanander Bani Sanchayan*, p. 22

learn the process of how to acquire and memorize numerous information, but unable to know about their utility; however from nature he will both learn the fact as well as its usage. Thus, the prospective of education over our whole life-structure seems quiet vast; as it does not remain limited just within the small boundary of books, but expanded throughout our whole life-experiences. This type of education is lacking still today.

In pre-independent India Indian politicians understood the necessity of reforming the ongoing educational system of British India. At the then India the main intention of the British educational policy was to make like-minded English-educated Indians for the survival of their rule over India for several more decades. These like-minded Indian clerks or native *babus* should be ignorant of Indian cultural greatness and unsympathetic towards the political scenario of British India. This was made prominent in the English Education Act of 1835, popularly known as Macaulay's *Minute*. For banning Indian students to join politics the British government took the help of the Indian Universities Act of 1904 along with the Carlyle Circular of 1905. However all such endeavors of the British government in pre-independent India helped Indians to realize the urge for establishing national education system and they tried to reconstruct the British education system at that time by reuniting the past Indian glory with the present scientific achievements of the West. In this political context of India the Dawn Society was established by Satish Chandra Mukherjee in 1902. Sri Aurobindo became the first Principal of the Bengal National College, later Jadavpur University, in 1906. In 1918 Tagore also established Sriniketan, for the same reason, which later took the form of today's

Visva-Bharati University. All these endeavors were the following necessary steps taken by the Indians for the establishment of the National Educational system in India.

A. Sri Aurobindo's Definition of Education:

We first become introduced with his thesis of education in his article named "A Preface on National Education" first published in *Arya*, a monthly reviewed newspaper in 1920-1921.²⁵⁸ Here he considered the education has to be true and living in nature so that it can be able to attract the pupil by its own credit. A true education of an individual is that which, as envisioned by him, is of 'right relation with the life, mind and soul of the people to which he belongs and with that great total life, mind and soul of humanity of which he himself is a unit and his people or nation a living, a separate and yet inseparable member.'²⁵⁹

From here we can discover, as following Sri Aurobindo, two characteristics of an individual, one is just as an individual, an intimate part of society and nation; and the other part is well-known as a universal man, an inseparable part of the entire universe. This realization seems extremely important in its intrinsic value. Education serves, in the theory of Sri Aurobindo, as the gateway of relating the individual with the family, society and nation as well as with the entire universe by arousing the feeling of universal brotherhood towards the entire humanity. With the help of proper kind of education one can discover his right proportion of

²⁵⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "A Preface of National Education", p. 5-16

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 14

relationship with that of the society, nation and also with that of universe. An individual, according to Sri Aurobindo, when take birth is just an individual; but along with his growth, he has to emerge as a family man, a social man, a religious man, a national man and last but not the least as an universal man in the sense of being a member of the family, society, religion and the universe.²⁶⁰ Therefore in the view of Sri Aurobindo, the responsibility of the true education is to prepare a student to be not only as a national man, but also as a universal man along with the sense of universal brotherhood towards the entire human community of the world. Thus we cannot blame that Sri Aurobindo's national system of education makes pupil's mind limited within the boundary of national life, but it also helps him to grow inwardly in such a way that he can be grown up as a universal man too. In this context we can discover the similarity of Sri Aurobindo's theory with that of Tagore as he also discovered the same inherent relation of man with nation and universe. For the development of the individual life, via education, according to Tagore, one has to overcome all the limitations of his individual personality as well as to search for his national and universal personalities.²⁶¹

What is the need of such characteristic feature of a man, as related to nation and universe, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo? From the ethical point of view we can say that every individual has some amount of responsibility towards his nation, although small in amount. A man residing within a national territory has to bear

²⁶⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "A Preface of National Education", p. 14

²⁶¹ Sharma, R. N., *Textbook of Educational Philosophy*, p. 320

some national liability. A nation is providing him proper food, clothing, education etc means of living; and then in his turn the man has to give his best to the nation. However a truly developed national person has to get rid of any kind of jealousy or envy towards other persons belonging not only to his own nation but also to that of other nations. That person also has his responsibility towards the universe which he is bound to perform for the betterment of the humanity. And in this endeavor he has to develop himself not only as a national man for the sake of his nation, but also as a universal man for the sake of the entire human race. This realization of universality within oneself is called as the arousal of Real Man by Sri Aurobindo.²⁶²

However we can co-relate this characteristic of a man's development as the Real man with nothing but following his *svadharma*. *Svadharma* is made up of two words 'sva' i.e. own and the word 'dharma' i.e. quality, character trait, nature etc. To Sri Aurobindo 'dharma' in *svadharma* stands for nature. Hence *svadharma* means one's own nature. To follow *svadharma*, as commanded by Sri Krishna to Arjuna, means to follow your own nature. However the concept of *svadharma*, according to Sri Aurobindo, is dependent upon four types of *swabhavas* (*svabhāvas*) or four fundamental character traits.²⁶³ Every man has his unique character trait and his *svadharma* has to follow his *swabhava*. To make it clear, we all know that there is four-fold caste system in society, *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Sudras* and all of these social sects have four different types of

²⁶² Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "A Preface of National Education", p. 14

²⁶³ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, "Swabhava and Swadharma", p. 509

swabhavas or fundamental character traits. Knowledge (*jñānam*), scientific discoveries (*vijñānam*) and indulgence into meditation to realize the existence of Supreme spirit and performance of spiritual actions related to him (*Brahmakarma*) are *swabhavas* of the *Brahmin* sects. Benevolence (*dāna*), chivalry (*śaurayam*), sticking in the battlefield, tolerance (*dhṛti*), etc are known to be the *swabhavas* of the *Kshatriya* sects. Agriculture (*kṛṣi*), monetary transaction related works, trade (*vānījyam*) and cattle-rearing etc are the *swabhavas* or fundamental character traits of the *Vaisya* sects. All kinds of service related works (*paricaryām*) are fundamental character traits of the *Sudra* sects. All of these four castes have to follow these character traits or *swabhavas* as their *svadharma*. And if someone wants to overlap the *svadharma* then the entire social structure will meet decay.²⁶⁴

But why should we compare the discovery of universal man as following Sri Aurobindo with that of a person's *svadharma*? Because just as a man is bound to follow his *svadharma* in the same way, by the help of proper education as a medium, man is bound to search for universal humanity. An education, which is proper in nature, helps to broaden man's point of view towards life, society and nation as well as towards humanity. This type of education makes a man totally free from every limitation of life, be it from the caste, sect, religion or even nation. A man who can understand this underlying purpose of true education could easily

²⁶⁴ As we found in the *Gita* Sri Krishna told Arjuna:

śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt

svadharme nidhanam śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ ||3/35||

[One should be prepared to die following one's own *svadharma* even if it is faulty and imperfect; to follow *paradharmā* is disastrous for the entire society.]

understand his relation with the entire universe as its invariable member and should be prepared to follow it strictly as his *svadharma*. Hence in Sri Aurobindo's thesis of education search for universality stands as nothing but following his *svadharma*.

B. Sri Aurobindo's thesis on National Education:

Sri Aurobindo's main aim regarding the establishment of national education policy is to concentrate towards the upliftment of India and Indians. Let us, in this context, try to understand the meaning of national education. Mr. Gopalkrishna Gokhale described 'national education' as the 'independent system of education'.²⁶⁵ Hence, in his view, the word 'national' stands for the independent education system of a nation. However national education certainly does not mean that and the term has been used by Sri Aurobindo in different connotation. When we look into the history of Indian politics we can discover that The Subjects Committee of Indian National Congress at Calcutta session used the word national education in the same sense uttered by Gopalkrishna Gokhale. In the opinion of the Moderate Congress leaders, a nation is an image, completely unconscious in nature, which exists in our minds; it has no material existence in reality. Their suggestion was that we have to abolish disparity in caste system and religious beliefs existing all over India and only then India as a nation can come into existence. But this opinion is completely fallacious in nature. In Sri Aurobindo's view, India with thousands of different castes and sub-castes, sects and sub-sects cannot be considered as a nation in the same sense if we follow them. A nation is truly a living entity, with consciousness living within and

²⁶⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "National Education", p. 12

that is why nation is always known to be nation-soul to Sri Aurobindo.²⁶⁶ As a living entity a nation is always growing from within; it has to be grown from the religious, political, economic etc every aspect of national life towards the arena of internationalism. Religion and castes are not permanent aspects of a nation; they are just the outer structures of a nation. The inner structure of a nation is made up of individuals and their souls that is why a nation is considered to be ‘full of consciousness’ by Sri Aurobindo.²⁶⁷ The nation stands as the nation-soul with a living identity to him. The national education hence, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, has to aim at constructing the human mind so developed in nature that it can be able to discover the unique identity of the nation as a living and soulful entity.

But the question is how could Sri Aurobindo give an explanation of his theory of nation when he said that nation is full of consciousness? How could we discover the consciousness factor of a nation? Sri Aurobindo beautifully answered it. For him nation is a ‘living entity’.²⁶⁸ A body is the example of a living entity like a nation. A body is made up of three parts – gross, subtle and causal. Just like a body the nation is also made up of three parts – gross (*s̥thula*), subtle (*sukṣma*) and causal (*kāraṇa*) according to Sri Aurobindo.²⁶⁹ Geographical territory of a nation, made up of rivers, mountains, farmlands etc, is called as the gross or *s̥thula* part by Sri Aurobindo. That means the physical part of a nation stands for its gross part. People living

²⁶⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, “National Education”, p. 13

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 13

²⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p. 13

²⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 13

within a nation along with their emotions, like joys, sorrows, desires, pains and pleasures, conjointly form up the subtle or *sukṣma* part of a nation. The causal or *kāraṇa* part of a nation is most important as it is like a seed-state quite similar to an atom or *aṇu*. This causal part of a nation that remains unchanged with time is nothing but consciousness itself.

In my view Sri Aurobindo's theory of national education is truly integral (*purṇa*) in the context of a nation as, unlike others, it tries to discover the hidden atomic i.e. consciousness factor of a nation. According to Sri Aurobindo education stands as the backbone of a nation which can help us to understand its spirit or soul 'imparted in a national spirit'.²⁷⁰ This spirit or soul factor of a nation is nothing but consciousness factor of individuals hidden within it. This discovery of the soul-factor of a nation is actually the uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's theory of national education unlike other contemporary Indian political thinkers.

National education is that which, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, will be established 'in a national way and under national control'.²⁷¹ What does it mean? It means that national education will attempt to make India free and for this we need to educate Indians so that they can gain control over the political scenario of the then India. The 'national control' depicted by Sri Aurobindo stands for the control of people residing within the nation, rather than that of its foreign administration.

²⁷⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "National Education", p. 12

²⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 18

Sri Aurobindo was in the favor of spreading the national education theory as an essential means of attaining the political freedom. Political liberty can be gained even if the countrymen were illiterate, but it could not sustain without the assurance of the freedom of education for the young generation of the country. If the children of any nation are deprived of education, then the proper improvement of that country will not happen. We, thus, have to understand the necessity of educational system as a backbone of any highly-developed nation. India is not an exception to this. Hence in his social-political thesis the educational theory has attained a high place.

For understanding the necessity of national education, the education which could grasp the true temperament of a nation, Sri Aurobindo never considered in going back to the past era of India. It is true that Indian ancient cultural heritage should be maintained via the national education accepted by him, but he never dismissed the scientific discoveries made by the Europe. While determining the principles of education, the first and foremost concern of this great visionary is to build up India as a great nation. Sri Aurobindo truly explained national education cannot be defined in one or two sentences, but we may describe it tentatively as the education which starts with the past and making full use of the present to build up a great nation.²⁷² The primary aim of Sri Aurobindo's thesis of education is to make the youths conscious of own cultural heritage and to combine the glory of the past with the achievements of the present.

²⁷² Sri Aurobindo, *India's Rebirth: Out of the Ruin of the West*, p. 13

According to Sri Aurobindo, there are three different essential parts taken to be in consideration in a true and living education – the common and unique individual; the nation along with the national spirit; and the inner feeling of universal humanity.²⁷³ The growth and development of an individual should be the primary objective of that true and ideal education. The aim of education should be to help the individual mind for the complete development of his inner qualities so that he may realize the full purpose of his whole life. The man, when become free from all boundary created by the family, clan and nation surrounding him, can truly realize the inner spirit of him. This arousal of inner spirit is termed as Life Divine by Sri Aurobindo.

Therefore his educational doctrine has been proved to be something spiritual in nature. In Sri Aurobindo's doctrine, man is not merely a living body; rather consist of several vital energies, an ego and a mind with the qualities of reasoning and imagination.²⁷⁴ The social, political and economic aspects of a human being truly constitute his external or outer side; but the real nature of a man consists in his soul or self, the utmost manifestation of *Sachchidanada*. Every human life, according to The Mother, as following Sri Aurobindo, has divine aspect inherent within his nature.²⁷⁵ The main aim of a human life is to identify his unity with the Almighty or *Brahman*; while by realizing this divine truth he can understand the reason behind

²⁷³ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "A Preface of National Education", p. 13

²⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 19-51

²⁷⁵ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Psychic and Spiritual Education", p. 121

his own earthly existence. By realizing himself as the manifestation of the Divine he can understand also his uniformity with that of other people belonging to the entire world which is gradually giving birth to the feeling of universal brotherhood. Sri Aurobindo symbolically said that then the Divine satisfied by the prayer of the individual will be bound to come down upon earth to fulfill the demands of Life Divine. Education thus stands, as viewed by The Mother following Sri Aurobindo, as the gateway by which we can reach towards this supreme manifestation of the divine on humans by making ‘a divine race upon earth’.²⁷⁶

C. Integral Education of Sri Aurobindo:

In his theory of education Sri Aurobindo concentrated wholly upon the development of body, life, mind and soul of the students. Education serves to improve the physical, vital, mental and psychic as well as the spiritual side of individual life. His educational doctrine is known to be the integral education as it aims at the integration of body, life, mind and soul-factor of a pupil unlike other educational thinkers. Other contemporary thinkers, like Tagore, Gandhi and so on, while talking about child education, concentrated only on the physical, the mental and very slightly upon the spiritual aspects of education. Unlike them Sri Aurobindo left no stone untouched while talking about child education. Education should make a child aware about his body, his sensual urges and mental propensities along with the discovery of his psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha*

²⁷⁶ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Psychic and Spiritual Education”, p. 131

(*Caitya Puruṣa*)²⁷⁷ and his true identity as the manifestation of the *Brahman*. His educational thesis, which concentrates on every aspect of the student life so thoroughly, very rightly be known as the integral education. However Sri Aurobindo never discriminated between the five types of education as it was done by The Mother who followed his theory of education and accordingly classified it into five parts. Hence while going through Sri Aurobindo's theory of education we also have to quote the opinion of The Mother. There are several criterion of training of students in Sri Aurobindo's integral thesis of education which are as follows:

- **Physical training/education:**

In this training program of the physical part of the student the bodily growth and development procedure is truly desirable. In Sri Aurobindo's own words – 'If our seeking is for a total perfection of the being, the physical part of it cannot be left aside; for the body is the material basis, the body is the instrument which we have to use.'²⁷⁸ Body is the material base of the soul and the advancement of body should not be ignored for the upliftment of the entire human life. For making life divine we have to start with making body divine; because if we consider self as divine then we should consider the body, the material foundation of it, also as divine [*Śarīram khalu dharmasādhanam*²⁷⁹]. And for this so-desired bodily development, the necessity of games and sports are highly appreciable. Sports and physical training

²⁷⁷ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Psychic and Spiritual Education", p. 122

²⁷⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Perfection of the Body", p. 68

²⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 68

programs given in the childhood and early youth would be tremendously helpful in bringing out the fullest potentialities of the student life.

However if we go through Sri Aurobindo's theory of physical education, as interpreted by The Mother, then we can discover three main goals to be attained by it. Behind preaching for Sri Aurobindo's bodily education, in the view of The Mother, these three aims are as follows:

- i. Controlling the bodily functions
- ii. Developing all bodily parts and bodily movements harmoniously
- iii. Rectifying all bodily deformities.²⁸⁰

Briefly speaking, a proper kind of bodily education, as conceived by The Mother, will enhance all body related problems like, to gain controlling power over all kinds of bodily operations; to move body harmoniously; to develop the bodily organs synchronously and to rectify all bodily irregularities and defects.²⁸¹

For maintenance of the body, according to The Mother, we need good amount of foods, requisite amount of sleep, development of the habit of bodily cleanliness and hygiene, practice of games and sports along with proper bodily exercises like yoga and meditation.²⁸² If we can keep our body practically in good shape and energetic

²⁸⁰ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Physical Education", p. 100

²⁸¹ Ibid, p. 100

²⁸² Ibid, p. 101-106

form, only then we can search for the way towards Life Divine as depicted by The Mother following Sri Aurobindo.

Sri Aurobindo's concept of physical education has enormous similarity with that of Tagore. One of the aims of education, in Tagore's view, should be the physical development of children. Physical education, according to him, has implications over the life of a child as it is mandatory for his complete development; because only then he gets enough opportunity to be mentally and physically fit and active for receiving education.²⁸³

Now let us try to analyze the reason behind Sri Aurobindo's declaration of body as the material basis upon which everything depends. Actually its answer is lying within the arena of spirituality. In his theory of evolution we can discover matter as the core or basis of all. Matter remains at the core and *Sachchidanada* at the highest realm. There is no other way to reach towards *Sachchidanada* other than through matter. Body as a material basis of human life is mandatory to be transformed if our main goal is to reach towards the Life Divine. We cannot make our life Divine if we neglect our body. Hence Sri Aurobindo truly mentioned that for making Life Divine we need to make the Body Divine.²⁸⁴ To awake the supreme consciousness in us we need to awake the body consciousness. In this way Sri Aurobindo beautifully synchronized spirituality with his theory of physical education.

²⁸³ Rabindranath Tagore, *Shiksha*, "Abaran", p. 67

²⁸⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Perfection of the Body", p. 68

The uniqueness of his physical education theory is that whatever it tells to us is so well-known in reality. Let me make my position clear. Through physical education we actually want to control our bodily functions, like walking, standing, sleeping etc synchronized with our bodies so that no further problem can arise. We all want to develop our bodily organs and synchronize our bodily movements in such a way so that we can never feel any problem relating to our bodies in near future. Everybody has some bodily deformities and to rectify them will make his body beautiful. In ancient scriptures body is compared with *Mandir* and it is believed that within a beautiful body a beautiful soul can reside; therefore we all should do the needful to make our bodies beautiful and perfect. Hence physical education thesis of Sri Aurobindo seems so appropriate in nature.

- **Vital training/education:**

Sri Aurobindo gave extreme importance on the training of the vital organs i.e. the sense-organs. The vital kind of education is the most ‘indispensable’ kind of education as interpreted by The Mother.²⁸⁵ The training of the sense-organs constitutes the vital aspects of education. These senses, according to Sri Aurobindo, constitute of eyes, ears, nose, skin and palate etc external sense organs and also the internal sense organ named as *manas*.²⁸⁶ In this part of the student’s life there exist the roots of numerous feelings, desires, sentiments, impulses and emotions as the determining factors of his own character. The importance of vital education, as

²⁸⁵ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “The Education of the Vital”, p. 107

²⁸⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “The Training of the Senses”, p. 36 & 38

conceived by The Mother, in the student's life is two-folds – firstly, it helps to develop the sense-organs; and secondly, through it one can little by little gain mastery over his character.²⁸⁷ The proper nourishment of the senses, according to The Mother, will help to generate generosity and nobility factors within children.²⁸⁸

The vital aspect of a man's life is known to be indispensable in nature as it is the deciding factor about the character of every individual to Sri Aurobindo. Indeed the vital part of a human life will decide how his character will be. However the vital part of human life seems very demanding to The Mother as its demands are insatiable.²⁸⁹ Indeed a person who longs for a good car, after having it can wish to buy another big car. Our vital urges have no restriction and it is really very hard to satisfy them. Vital urges depend on the satisfaction of our sense-organs like, eyes, ears, nose, sense and palate and unfortunately our five sense-organs are not very ready to be satisfied. Hence a man in his whole life has to run to satisfy his vital pleasures but all of his trials have to go in vain. The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, very appropriately thus claimed that 'the vital in man's nature is a despotic and exacting tyrant'.²⁹⁰

In the analysis of The Mother, two ideas were very popular, especially in the West, about the nature of the vital aspect of human life. They are as follows:

²⁸⁷ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "The Education of the Vital", p. 109

²⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 111

²⁸⁹ Ibid, p. 107

²⁹⁰ Ibid, p. 107

- i. The goal of life is to seek vital pleasures.
- ii. The vitalistic natures, with which we are born, are quite impossible to change.²⁹¹

The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, refuted the first view which is quite similar with the *Charvaka* point of view of life – *Jāvat jīveṭ sukham jīveṭ, ṛṇam kṛtā ghr̥tam pibeṭ; vasmīvūtasya dehasya punarāgamanam kutah* i.e. we should live happily, we can even take loans to have good foods and live lavishly (symbolically called as *ghr̥tam pibeṭ*); because after death no incarnation can take place to fulfill our unfulfilled desires. According to The Mother, the goal of human life should not be the attainment of vital pleasures by whatever means. The source of our highest happiness is Truth-consciousness or *Rit-Chetana*, whereas ‘obscure and aggressive egoism’ brings forth only misery and fatal disaster in our life.²⁹² Pleasure of any low kind is not the ultimate aim of life because it can change with time. We can grow more and more dissatisfied of it after getting initial amount of vitalistic pleasure. That pleasure, according to The Mother, is welcomed which will bring us near to the Divine and that is known to be Truth-consciousness.²⁹³

The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, also refuted the second idea even though it seemed as ‘Herculean task’ to her.²⁹⁴ According to her, we can change our vitalistic natures though looked quite impossible. Indeed the change in our vitalistic character

²⁹¹ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “The Education of the Vital”, p. 107

²⁹² Ibid, p. 108

²⁹³ Ibid, p. 108

²⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 108

is important because a person, unable to control his vital desires, cannot obtain a scope to improve his way of life. There remains the scope of vitalistic education which will help us to control our vital organs. For the education of the vital, according to The Mother, we need to:

- a. Develop and utilize our five sense-organs
- b. Become conscious of one's own nature and gradually understand the way of his transformation and union with the Divine.²⁹⁵

The uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's thesis regarding vital education is that there remains the touch of spirituality inherent within even behind it. Be it the concept of Truth-Consciousness or the concept of union with the Divine spiritual touch is prevalent everywhere.

- **Mental training/education:**

One of the important parts of human development procedure is to develop the mind, because, in Sri Aurobindo's view, the mind or *antaḥkaraṇa* is known to be one of the most important instruments in the hands of the educationists.²⁹⁶ Regarding the mental training procedure Sri Aurobindo gave importance on the role played by the tutor as he is the main person who can nurture the mental faculties of his students. In this training of mental faculty a student's memory power along with powers of judgment and imagination have to be boosted. However the logical faculty of the student's mind has to be sharpened by his constant training in logic. The student has

²⁹⁵ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "The Education of the Vital", p. 109

²⁹⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "The Powers of the Mind", p. 23

to grow in his own way. His mind, according to Sri Aurobindo, cannot be molded or trained in such a way so that he has to grow under any external pressure.²⁹⁷

While discussing about the procedure of mental training Sri Aurobindo divided the mind or *antaḥkaraṇa* into four separate layers. The first layer is called by him as *citta* or ‘storehouse of memory’.²⁹⁸ *Citta* is the foundation of all other layers. It is known as a passive memory which passively stores every experience. The second layer is, in his view, the proper mind or *manas* i.e. our sixth sense-organ which translates every experience gathered by us through our five sense-organs, e.g. eyes, ears, nose, touch and palate. It is called as the active memory. A proper kind of mental education will give us right way to control the mind or *manas*. The third layer is the intellect or *buddhi*. It is known to him as ‘the real instrument of thought’.²⁹⁹ The intellect or *buddhi* can be divided, by him, into two important faculties – the functions and faculties of the right-hand and the functions and faculties of the left-hand. The right-hand portion helps us to develop our faculties concerning judgment, memory and observation; while the left-hand portion helps us to develop our faculties of comparison and reasoning. The right-hand portion helps us to be comprehensive, creative and synthetic; while the left-hand portion helps us to be critical and analytic. The right-hand is the controlling power while the left-hand part is not able to do that. The right-hand controls the soul, the main part of knowledge factors regarding the mental education, unlike the left-hand. But both of

²⁹⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “The Human Mind”, p. 20

²⁹⁸ Ibid, “The Powers of the Mind”, p. 23

²⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 24

them are extremely mandatory if we want to get the all-round mental education of a student. Hence in the system of mental education we have to prepare the children's mind in such a way that an all-round development of his mind can happen. The most important layer is the fourth layer i.e. *bodhi* which, according to Sri Aurobindo, helps us to have 'intuitive perception of truth' and 'direct vision of knowledge'.³⁰⁰ In that state of mind we can directly perceive the truth just like the ancient *rishis* (*r̥ṣis*) can do. This power, where we can have intuition of knowledge, is very rare but a true mental education helps a child to develop his mind in such a way so that he can perceive the ultimate truth directly. Here the perception of truth is not dependent on any medium like our five sense-organs. In that state of mind a man, in Sri Aurobindo's view, stands as a 'prophet of truth'.³⁰¹ When man can reach towards the level of supramental consciousness, then only this state of mind occurs in him.

According to Sri Aurobindo, in the mental training procedure of a child, we have to develop at first his memory and judgment powers.³⁰² The development of memory power does not mean to make a child swallow the vast amount of bookish knowledge. It means that a student should be encouraged by his teacher to memorize previously seen objects and make judgmental opinions about them. In the mental training process the most important part is the training conducted through

³⁰⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "The Power of the Mind", p. 25

³⁰¹ *Ibid*, p. 25

³⁰² *Ibid*, "The Training of the Mental Faculties", p. 45

imagination. The training of imagination, according to Sri Aurobindo, involves three requisite functions:

- i. Formation of mental images
- ii. Combination of thoughts with their images
- iii. Appreciation of beauty or charm of every image with the thing correlated.³⁰³

In the evaluation of the Mother, a true education of the mind will prepare us for the attainment of the higher life i.e. Life Divine, through five principal stages:³⁰⁴

- a. Development of concentration power
- b. Development of expansion or wideness of the mind
- c. Organization of ideas around a central idea namely Truth-consciousness or *Rit-Chetana*
- d. Thought control and rejection of undesirable or bad thoughts of mind
- e. Development of the power of mental silence or ‘receptive silence’³⁰⁵ where the mind goes to the receiving mode. We can receive everything in this silent state of mind and can be guided by the higher mental plane i.e. Supermind.

³⁰³ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “The Training of the Mental Faculties”, p. 47

³⁰⁴ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Mental Education”, p. 114-115

³⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p. 120

The uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's mental education is that it has spirituality inherent. He always tried to reconcile his theory of mind with that of the Divine consciousness or Supramental Consciousness. The existence of the concepts regarding *Rit-Chetana* (Truth-consciousness) and Supermind are clearly indicative of such spiritual touch hidden behind his thesis concerning mental education.

- **Psychic training/education:**

Sri Aurobindo's uniqueness is that his educational thesis does not end with the training of the intellect, but also aims to comprehend the true motive of human life and the reason behind one's existence upon this earth. For this unique realization we have to go through the psychic training program. According to The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, the eternal principle, upon which the basis of one's own existence depends, is the psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha* commonly known to be the Soul.³⁰⁶ The soul is the inherent factor of a human being. So in the educational training procedure the training of the soul or psychic being seems extremely necessary for Sri Aurobindo as conceived by The Mother.

According to The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, every human being has the hidden possibility of greater consciousness, in the sense of psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha* (*Caitya Puruṣa*), inherent within. The scope of human mind is very much limited. What our mind cannot know this greater Psychic consciousness can directly perceive. Through the physical, vital and mental educations we can build up the personality of a student; while by the psychic education we can discover the reason

³⁰⁶ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Psychic and Spiritual Education", p. 122

behind our coming upon this earth. The very discovery about the reason behind our existence, according to The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, is somewhat ‘mystic’ in nature.³⁰⁷ The main reason behind our existence upon earth is nothing else but due to the *līlā* of the Supermind upon earth. At this stage, in her view, we can realize that we are none but the mere manifestations of the *Brahman* and for this realization we need to identify first our psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha*.³⁰⁸ Psychic education is the medium via which we can discover the psychic being and identify ourselves with it.

The discovery of psychic being, in the view of The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, will bring us nearer towards the sense of universality, unlimited expansion and eternal continuity of our soul.³⁰⁹ Egocentrism makes us alone, while the discovery of psychic being in us makes us realize that we all are the same. Therefore the sense of universality has to be aroused in that state. Self is always unlimited, in this sense it has limitless expansion. Soul is also known as a timeless entity as it is expanded through three stages of time or *tri-kāla* – past (*atīt*), present (*bartamāna*) and future (*vabiṣyaṭ*). Hence its continuity is known to be timeless. At this state we can be free from all sort of egoism which is beautifully explained as ‘the walls of your external personality’³¹⁰ by The Mother. Ego is the external cover

³⁰⁷ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Psychic and Spiritual Education”, p. 122

³⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 122

³⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 124

³¹⁰ Ibid, p. 124-125

of our personality trait. When we can make ourselves free from the bondage of limiting ego, then we can realize the true meaning of our lives.

But what is the procedure of the development of our psychic being?

The proper development of the psychic being will be possible, according to The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, by the help of psychic education and the road towards the discovery of psychic being via the psychic education is as follows:³¹¹

- a) We need to know our psychic being as it is extremely necessary for understanding spiritual things. Mind is unable to judge these spiritual things. Mind can judge only ordinary objects, but objects with spirituality inherent within is surely extra-ordinary in nature that mind fails to explore.
- b) We have to give up our life-long desires for comfort, satisfaction, joy and happiness. Satisfaction, joy etc feelings are limited and can stop our progress. We have to burn all of them so that our progress can be integral or *Purna* in nature.
- c) We have to take pleasure from smallest things happening in our lives but our seeking for pleasure is a completely banned.
- d) We should control over our faculty of excitement, agitation and anger. Mind should learn how to restrain it from every kind of temperamental change. Quietness of mind is needed.

³¹¹ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Psychic and Spiritual Education", p. 125-126

- e) We should not give much importance on the face-value of anything. That means we should not take the things or circumstances as they come to us. We have to judge their inner values.
- f) We should never complain about the behavior of others unless we have the power to change them or mold them according to our wish.
- g) We should try hard to achieve our goal of life, whether big or small in nature.
- h) Before going to sleep we should take few seconds practicing the state of mental quietness and silence.
- i) We have to concentrate towards the great discovery of life and march towards it with confidence.
- j) Before speaking we have to check our own words so that we cannot harm others.
- k) Briefly speaking, we should not forget the goal of our lives even for just a moment. Only then we can discover our innermost being i.e. the psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha* of which we are consciously unaware.³¹²

The uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's psychic education is that it crosses the limits of ordinary system of education. Ordinary system of education mainly focuses upon the physical, vital and mental aspects instead of the psychic one. The way towards the discovery of our psychic being remains unknown in the educational theories of other contemporary thinkers like Gandhi and Tagore. Spiritualism also exists in

³¹² The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Psychic and Spiritual Education", p. 122

their thesis as they gave immense importance on the discovery of the Real Man within. But both of Gandhi and Tagore's educational theory fails to show us the process of the discovery of this Real Man as clear as Sri Aurobindo.

- **Spiritual training/education:**

The unique highest limit of Sri Aurobindo's educational training procedure, according to The Mother, is the supramental training.³¹³ None other than Sri Aurobindo ever explained so clearly that we can have the possibility of having spiritual education within our system of education. Actually his main aim is to show the extremely difficult path of the ascent of the human race towards the *Sachchidanada* and to call him, just like Bhagirath called upon River Ganga, down upon earth. For the fulfillment of Sri Aurobindo's spiritual aim, in the view of The Mother, the training of the spirituality via the spiritual education is ultimately necessary.

Sri Aurobindo's uniqueness of educational thesis lies in his introduction of psychic and spiritual educations. But most critics fail to differentiate them. However there remain, according to The Mother, several inner differences between the psychic education and the spiritual education as introduced by Sri Aurobindo.³¹⁴

Firstly, according to The Mother, psychic education of Sri Aurobindo involves a higher psychic realization upon earth i.e. the discovery of our inner union with the Divine; while spiritual education means having *mokṣa* or liberation from the earthly

³¹³ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Psychic and Spiritual Education", p. 127

³¹⁴ Ibid, p. 127-129

limitations and our return to the *Sachchidanada*.³¹⁵ Briefly speaking, psychic education helps us to realize our true identities as the mere manifestations of the Divine; while spiritual education helps us to be united with him.

Secondly, in the view of The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, psychic consciousness helps us to reach towards the revelation, within some certain time span, of our true identity as nothing but the manifestations of the divine; whereas spiritual consciousness, being ‘infinite and eternal’, is totally out of the limits of time.³¹⁶ Let me make the position clear. When we think that we are the manifestations of God then actually such realization comes while existing within the time-span of one birth. But the way towards Supermanhood and the achievement of Life Divine is truly very time-taking process; it can take several births of the liberated person or *jīvanmukta puruṣa* (*puruṣa*) for this. Symbolically we can say that our realization of the Divine existence in our lives is the work of *kāla* while the descent of the Supermind upon the earthen level to make the lives of human beings truly Life Divine is the work of *Mahākāla*.

Thirdly, according to The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, to live a psychic life a human being has to be free from all kinds of selfishness; while to live a complete spiritual life he has to be free from ego-ness or self-ness.³¹⁷ Let me explain it. Psychic consciousness is not the direct consciousness that comes from supramental

³¹⁵ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Psychic and Spiritual Education”, p. 127

³¹⁶ Ibid, p. 127

³¹⁷ Ibid, p. 128

or Divine Consciousness. Spiritual consciousness is the medium between the both. In psychic consciousness some amounts of ego feelings remain alive. If I think that I am the revelation of the *Brahman* (*ahaṃ Brahmāsmi*) then there remains the possibility of feeling of supremacy than others. I can feel myself superior to other living beings as, due to this realization, only I am the revelation of the Divine. Thus even though I have to be completely free from wickedness, mean-mindedness and selfishness; I fail to be free from the grasp of my ego. But at the state of spiritual consciousness I can be aware of the fact that, not only me, but all human beings are the manifestations of God. Hence here we have to be completely self-less or ego-less in this respect. Here the word ‘self’ used by The Mother stands for ego.

Fourthly, in the view of The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, when we can realize our union with the Divine, in the mode of psychic education, then this realization will only bring our dissolution or *nirvāṇa* from the body.³¹⁸ Via the mode of our psychic education we can arouse our psychic consciousness. In the psychic education thesis of Sri Aurobindo we have to search for the roads of our divine union with the *Brahman* via the medium of our innermost being i.e. psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha* which is, according to The Mother, the core of our bodies.³¹⁹ Dissolution or *nirvāṇa* means being free from the bondage of body. A person after getting *nirvāṇa* can be limited by worldly desires and hence his state of *nirvāṇa* may come to an end. It will be quite justified to say that *nirvāṇa* is purely temporary

³¹⁸ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Psychic and Spiritual Education”, p. 129

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, p. 122

in nature. While in the case of spiritual education the body is not related. Here our main emphasis is to arouse the spiritual consciousness and the attainment of *mokṣa* or liberation. The attainment of *mokṣa* is permanent in nature because a person, after being liberated, never comes back to the earthen level once again. *Mokṣa* means permanent liberation from all worldly bondages. Briefly speaking, if we go through the ancient scriptures then this *nirvāṇa* is related with *jīvanmukti* (liberation before death when the *sañcita karma* and *sañciyamāna karma* ceases unlike his *prārabdhha karma*) and *mokṣa* is related with *videhamukti* (liberation after death). This is beautifully mentioned by The Mother as the psychic education stands for ‘higher realisation upon earth’ while the spiritual education means ‘an escape from all earthly manifestation, even away from the whole universe, a return to the unmanifest’.³²⁰

Let me make this position clear. If we go thorough psychic education of Sri Aurobindo then we will discover that, as conceived by The Mother, it helps a person to get individual salvation; while spiritual education helps him to yield to the *Sachchidanada* for all in the form of collective salvation. The uniqueness of his thesis is that he never accepted that getting liberation is the ultimate limit. He truly explained that we cannot be liberated if others are suffering from pains. A truly liberated person, being completely selfless in nature, has to think about liberating others too. There is no need of such liberation which will not help the liberated soul to end the miseries and distress of the entire human folks. In Sri Aurobindo’s theory

³²⁰ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Psychic and Spiritual Education”, p. 127

a liberated person has to work, just like the concept of *lokasamgraha* of the *Gita*, for making others prepared from cutting of the worldly bondages in such a way so that they can altogether ascent to the Supermanhood and welcome the descent of the Supermind upon the earthen level.³²¹

Actually, in the evaluation of The Mother, Sri Aurobindo conceived that the psychic education serves as the gateway towards our achievement of spiritual education by evoking the spiritual consciousness.³²² According to her, Sri Aurobindo believed that when we can surrender ourselves completely and be identified with *Sachchidanada*, then in this procedure the Divine has to be bound to come down upon the earth and the road towards Supermanhood and Life Divine get completed.³²³ Truly when we realize our union with the *Brahman* then he also has to come down to make our lives divine. Thus the realization of our union with the Divine by discovering psychic being (via psychic education) will open the road towards the Supramental descent upon earth (via spiritual education). This supramental descent upon earth for making our lives Life Divine will be made clearer, in the opinion of The Mother, via another kind of education namely the supramental education.³²⁴

³²¹ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Psychic and Spiritual Education”, p. 127

³²² Ibid, p. 127

³²³ Ibid, p. 131

³²⁴ Ibid, p. 130

The theory regarding spiritual education is very important in Sri Aurobindo's educational thesis. It is the threshold, in the view of The Mother, by whose help the entire human race, irrespective of their difference of castes, religions, nationality, can reach towards the realm of Supermanhood and appear as 'a divine race upon earth'³²⁵ by making Sri Aurobindo's dream of Life Divine possible.

Thus it could be seen that Sri Aurobindo aimed at the wholesome transformation of the student life through his integral education theory. Indeed a truly integral education has three central aims to be fulfilled – (1) for an individual, to outgrow the fullest possibilities of his soul; (2) for the nation, to strengthen and enrich its nation-soul while focusing on its own *dharma*; and last but not the least (3) for the advancement of both the individual and the nation in such a way so that it can grow into the ascending powers of mind and soul of humanity.³²⁶ And all of these aims truly focus on the Sri Aurobindo's most desired awakening of the spiritual being.

D. Three Principles of Education:

In this context we can go through the three principles of integral education as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.

The first principle of true teaching, according to Sri Aurobindo, is that 'nothing can be taught'³²⁷ i.e. the student should not be pressurized in receiving education. The

³²⁵ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Psychic and Spiritual Education", p. 131

³²⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "A Preface of National Education", p. 13

³²⁷ Ibid, "The Human Mind", p. 20

role of a teacher is not that of the instructor or task-master, but that of a helper and guide. Every student born with enormous potentialities and the teacher has to encourage him so that his inner qualities can be gradually developed. The task of the teacher is certainly not to put lots of information to his student which unfortunately becomes one of the most essential parts of even today's educational system. The teacher, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, has to show just the proper way of developing the inner possibilities of every child and not more than that. He should not even dare to train a child's mind, rather has to bring forth the inner qualities that are within every child. Sri Aurobindo straight-forwardly claimed that every child is an enquirer, a merciless investigator and analyzer of everything.³²⁸ Every child has voracious intellectual curiosity and we have to use it in such a way so that we can prepare him to understand the world and also himself. Every child, according to him, has the power of imagination and we have to nurture this artistic mental faculty in him.³²⁹ Mental education given in such a way will help a child to be perfectly grown up in future.

R.N. Tagore equally laid emphasis upon the mental aspects of student education. In his view, for the proper mental growth of a student we have to flourish two powers hidden within, i.e. the power of thinking and the power of imagination.³³⁰ However, if we evaluate Tagore's educational thesis then we will discover that, to him, the

³²⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Simultaneous and Successive Teaching", p. 34

³²⁹ Ibid, p. 34-35

³³⁰ Tagore, R.N., *Shiksha*, "Abaran", p. 76-77

prevalent educational system in pre-independent India, which is unfortunately true even in the present scenario of Indian education, put too much stress upon the memory power and too little on thinking and imagination of the students. The students have to bear the burden of memorizing information forced by their teachers, but do not learn how to apply them in reality. But if the child, according to him, from the very beginning learns how to apply his knowledge, with the faculties of thinking and imagination, then his mental capacity will be naturally flourished and the mind will, in fact, receive the appropriate opportunity to show its inherent abilities.³³¹

The second principle regarding Sri Aurobindo's educational thought is that we should give every child enough opportunity to grow naturally.³³² According to him, nothing could be imposed upon him as an external factor in learning procedure. We cannot hammer a child as he is not lifeless like clay. He has born with some inner mental potentialities and we have to nurture them. There can be no greater error than for the parents to arrange beforehand that their child shall develop this or that particular quality or a pre-arranged career. To decide that an artist's or a doctor's child has to be the artist or doctor can affect fatally over the natural growth process of the child. The student should get enough liberty so that he can be able to nourish his inner mental potentialities and can make himself perfect. Every child, according to Sri Aurobindo, has something divine as he is also the divine manifestation upon

³³¹ Tagore, R.N., *Shiksha*, "Abaran", p. 76-77

³³² Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "The Human Mind", p. 20

the earth.³³³ Truly, if we evaluate Sri Aurobindo's social-political thesis then we will realize that to him every human being is the divine manifestation.³³⁴ This is the reason behind his calling of children as the manifestation of the Divine with enormous hidden possibilities. Hence, in his opinion, we have to let the child to follow his own *dharma* or nature instead of doing any permanent harm by giving only bookish information to him.

In this context we can discover the similarity of educational thoughts of Sri Aurobindo with that of Tagore. Tagore also realized that the traditional system of education under the British rule was tampering with the future of Indian students. In his opinion, in the name of education we make children bound to gather or even swallow several types of bookish information. So, the pupils are, according to him, really very unfortunate as no one other than them suffers from such a tremendous pressure of education and have to bear extreme pain in their procedure of learning.³³⁵ Such signs of terror and mechanism are existent in everywhere of the traditional system of education. Hence education, in this ongoing system, is making men mechanical, but fails to awake the Real man within him. But if education can be mixed up with happiness and freedom of learning, then the pupil's powers of thinking and reasoning will naturally be developed. In this way the inner possibilities of every child will come out with fullest potentialities. Thus we can

³³³ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "The Human Mind", p. 21

³³⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 661

³³⁵ Tagore, R.N., *Shiksha*, "Jatiya Vidyalaya", p. 62

discover from their concepts that character building was accepted by both of them as the integral part of education.

The third principle of education, in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, is that 'to work from the near to the far, from that which is to that which shall be.'³³⁶ What does it mean? According to Sri Aurobindo, man's nature is totally dependent upon his past, his heredity, atmospheric circumstances, his surroundings, his nationality and love for his country. All these above qualities assist to develop feelings for his nation in the child. However a proper kind of education helps to broaden the point of view of the student from nationalism to internationalism. The national identity of the students helps them to be the children of the past, possessors of the present and the creators of the future. In such a way via the help of true education a student outgrows his national identity into the realm of internationality. Therefore it is said by Sri Aurobindo that through this process of education we can grow from that which we are as the national beings to that which we shall be as the international beings. The national aspect of education, according to him, indeed helps a man to reach beyond the boundary of nationalism and to grow as an international being.

Tagore in his theory of education, just like Sri Aurobindo, said that education must work as a medium of self-realization of man by the help of which he could find out his harmony with nature, with universe and even with the whole human race.³³⁷ So, also in his writing we discover the deep urge to explore man's relation with

³³⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "The Human Mind", p. 21

³³⁷ Tagore, R.N., *Shiksha*, "Shikshar Milan", p. 192-193

everything surrounding him as in Sri Aurobindo. For the development of the individual, as conceived by Tagore, the necessity of identifying the individual soul along with the universal soul is extremely necessary. Hence education helps a man to overcome all the limitations of his individual personality as well as to search for his national and international personalities. Tagore truly evaluated that this universal personality of a man can be discovered not only within himself, but also in every single moment deploring his relationship with that of nation and universe.³³⁸

The importance of all these three principles of education has to be rediscovered by us as it seems urgent for the development of Indian educational structure for even this twenty-first century.

In this context we can show the influence of Sri Aurobindo's theory of education in the West. Maria Montessori (1870-1952), who was the founder of the *Casa Dei Bambini* or Children's House in Rome, tried to utilize Sri Aurobindo's educational concepts after reevaluating it in the western perspective. Sri Aurobindo considered human beings, so also children, spiritual in nature and Maria Montessori, in the same way, called children as *spiritual embryo*. According to her, the growing human being is not simply a biological entity, but a spiritual energy seeking expression in the form of a human body within the physical world. Briefly speaking, he is like a soul limited within the realm of human body. A guiding principle of Montessori's pedagogy was the concept regarding the sensitivity of the

³³⁸ Tagore, R.N., *Shiksha*, "Vidyasamavaya", p. 179

learning period which envisaged children as moving through different growth periods during which they grow in such a way that when they wished to learn languages they would fast absorb it from the spoken words around them; and they even would similarly tackle the development of their own motor skills from their environment or surroundings. What Montessori emphasized was that the role of the parents and educator during these active periods was to provide the stimulation and resources to the child. We can discover in her theory a compelling spiritual need driving the child to form his personality; whereas careless parenting or over-education stops this spontaneous process and leads towards various negative manifestations of the child's nature.³³⁹ This thesis of Montessori is amazingly similar with the education theory of Sri Aurobindo.

Now the question is in what context we draw similarity between the theories of Maria Montessori with that of Sri Aurobindo? All the three principles of education in Sri Aurobindo's thesis try to make us fascinated about the use of the Divine portion of a man for achieving the ultimate goal of humanity or Life Divine. A human being is thought to be a portion of the divinity enwrapped in mind and body, i.e. a conscious manifestation of the universal Soul; and at the summit of his ascent, man is bound to rise to something greater than his physical, vital and mental personalities, i.e. to his spiritual being. Within him remains the possibility of supreme manifestation of the soul of man – 'his ultimate *raison d'être* his real

³³⁹ Ron Miller, *Nourishing the Spiritual Embryo: Educational Vision of Maria Montessori*, 2002 (accessed at <http://www.pathsoflearning.net>) and Maria Montessori, *The Secret of Childhood*, Orient Longman, reprint, 2006

paramartha and highest *purushartha*'.³⁴⁰ So education stands to Sri Aurobindo not only as a means of learning, but also of flourishing inwardly as a spiritual being. This notion of Sri Aurobindo is quite similar in nature with that of Maria Montessori's notion of spiritual embryo.

E. Relevance of Integral Education: Road towards Life Divine:

Now we can ask an important question regarding the relevance of Sri Aurobindo's integral education thesis from the point of view of spirituality. Education and spirituality are two separate fields. How could we correlate them with each other?

If we think from the point of view of Sri Aurobindo then these two are compatible with each other. Education is the gateway, in his theory, by whose assistance we can go towards the road of attaining the ultimate spiritual satisfaction.³⁴¹ According to the followers of him the specialty of Sri Aurobindo's education thesis is that it introduces the psychic and spiritual kinds of education which are far beyond the boundaries of understanding of common man. The main significance of these psychic and spiritual educations, as conceived by him, is to make us prepare to achieve the road of Life Divine. It is true that the goal set by Sri Aurobindo is purely metaphysical in nature. And education works as mandatory tools for achieving this goal.

³⁴⁰ Mukherjee, Jugal Kishore, *Principles and Goals of Integral Education*, p. 10

³⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "A Preface of National Education", p. 16

The existence of psychic education and spiritual education are the specialty of Sri Aurobindo's theory regarding education. They are indeed the gateways of Life Divine. It is thought by the critics that Life Divine is actually a utopian state and there is no way to achieve it. But Sri Aurobindo's thesis concerning Life Divine is not at all a utopia and the road towards its achievement is the way of leading a man to achieve the psychic and spiritual senses of education.

If we go through the integral education thesis of Sri Aurobindo, as conceived by The Mother, then the integral education has to follow the path of four-fold austerities and four-fold liberations to reach to the ultimate end of Life Divine.³⁴² Through these four-fold austerities we can get hold of four-fold liberations that will, according to The Mother, help us to reach Life Divine.

The four austerities, according to The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, are as follows:³⁴³

- *Tapasya* of Love (psychic austerity)
- *Tapasya* of Knowledge (mental austerity)
- *Tapasya* of Power (vital austerity)
- *Tapasya* of Beauty (physical austerity)

³⁴² The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Four Austerities and Four Liberations", p. 132

³⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 134

These four-fold austerities will naturally lead us towards the road of four-fold liberations. The four liberations, in the view of The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, are as follows:³⁴⁴

- Emotional Liberation
- Mental Liberation
- Vital Liberation
- Physical Liberation

If we discuss the road toward Life Divine with the help of the doctrine of four austerities, as conceived by the Mother, then the *tapasya* (*tapasyā*) of Love along with others is considered as the gateway of it. They can reach towards Life Divine via the help of four liberations. *Tapasya* of beauty in the sense of divine beauty, *tapasya* of power in the sense of divine power and *tapasya* of knowledge in the sense of divine knowledge helps to go towards the Life Divine. But other three types of *tapasya* stand low in grades than the *tapasya* of Love.

However the difficulty is that, in the context of *tapasya* of Love, the term ‘love’ is not used in the sense of any narrow egoistic human love, rather in the sense of the divine love. Only by the help of higher love we can control the uncontrollable urges of the narrow egoistic love. This divine kind of love has two inner movements hidden within – supreme power of attraction and irresistible need of complete self-

³⁴⁴ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Four Austerities and Four Liberations”, p. 159-160

surrender.³⁴⁵ Hence if we want to go through the path of Life Divine then we have to follow the advice of The Mother:

‘If therefore you want to be like the Divine, love Him alone. One who has experienced the ecstasy of the communion of love with the Divine can alone know how insipid, dull and feeble all other love is, in comparison.’³⁴⁶

All the four austerities naturally lead us towards the four liberations which are the gateway of the Life Divine. Emotional liberation helps individuals to be free from emotional bondages and sufferings in such a way that they can enjoy their integral union with the Supreme. Men, being emotional in nature, always remain limited within the boundary of suffering and bondage. If they can make themselves free from this narrow limit of suffering then they can easily correlate themselves with the Divine. In the view of The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo, mental liberation or liberation from ignorance helps our mind to realize the existence of gnostic consciousness³⁴⁷ within us. Due to ignorance or *avidyā*, we can mistaken our identity and detach us from the Divine. But when, with self-knowledge or *tattva-jñāna*, our *avidyā* or ignorance diminishes then we will truly identify ourselves as none other than the manifestation of the Supreme. Vital liberation or liberation from desire is also important in nature. It helps us to identify the divine will hidden within, devoid of the narrow self-centered egoistic human desire. Whenever we are

³⁴⁵ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Four Austerities and Four Liberations”, p. 153

³⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 157

³⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 159

guided by our desires we cannot even reach nearer to the Divine. But the discovery of the divine will, deeply inherent within us, has been the ultimate goal to be achieved by vital liberation. Finally, the physical liberation or liberation from the bondage of body helps us to gain freedom from our sub-conscious or semi-conscious levels of impulses. Our impulses limited us within the physical realm. When we free ourselves from the blind impulses then we will be touched by the supramental consciousness hidden within us by the help of *Chaitya Purusha* (*Caitya Puruṣa*) or the innermost being according to The Mother, following Sri Aurobindo.³⁴⁸

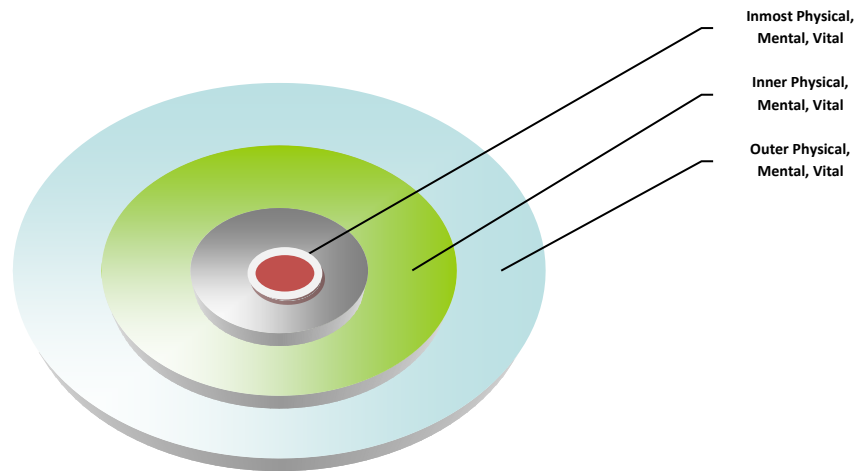
From here the road towards Life Divine will open by discovering the true nature of psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha*. However, according to the prediction of The mother, the way towards this discovery is not at all an easy road to reach. By the help of self-knowledge (*ātma-jñāna* or *tattva-jñāna*) we can discover the existence of inner divinity within us. While for discovering this inner divinity (God within you)³⁴⁹ first of all we have to discover the inmost being or psychic being which is considered as *Chaitya Purusha* by Sri Aurobindo. And this discovery of psychic being leads us to go through Sri Aurobindo's notion of psychic education.

Now what is *Chaitya Purusha* (*Caitya Puruṣa*) or psychic being according to Sri Aurobindo? *Chaitya Purusha* means the conscious being as 'Chaitya' stands for '*chetnā-maya*' or 'conscious' and '*Purusha*' stands for 'being'. It is that stage of

³⁴⁸ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Four Austerities and Four Liberations", p. 159-160

³⁴⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 665

self-knowledge where we can find out our inherent connection with the Divine. Here the limitation of self-ignorance demolishes and through this inner consciousness we can understand the divine connection with us. *Ātman* is known to be in divine connection with *Brahman* here, but there is time to reach to the ultimate realization that *ātman = Brahman*. For knowing its exact location let us take the help of the following figure:



 = psychic being [inmost being] or *Chaitya Purusha*³⁵⁰

Sri Aurobindo’s psychic being, according to The Mother, actually stands for the projection of the divine in some certain time and place within our bodily realm.³⁵¹

³⁵⁰ This drawing is as extracted from A.S. Dalal’s *A Greater Psychology: An Introduction to the Psychological Thought of Sri Aurobindo*, p. 346 [Fig. 3; Purusha and Prakriti]

³⁵¹ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Psychic and Spiritual Education”, p. 131

Here we can be aware of the fact that we, all human beings, are the manifestation of the Divine or *Brahman*.

However the discovery of this psychic being is not so easy in nature. An individual, always surrounded by his narrow egoistic ventures, never want to be indulged into the search for his inner being deep inherent within. It is a road very difficult to be achieved by an individual in this materialistic world I suppose.

But our search for Life Divine certainly not ends with the discovery of the psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha*. Psychic education just opens the door to reach there. It is better to be known as the gateway towards another education, namely spiritual education, which certainly serves our purpose ultimately. By the help of psychic education we can identify our inmost being or psychic being and also realize that men are nothing else but the manifestation of the *Brahman*; but with the help of spiritual education, via complete self-surrender to the Divine, we have to comprehend the ultimate truth of our life i.e. to make the life of the entire human race the Life Divine by its touch.³⁵² At the latter stage (similar with *Advaita Vedanta's* main theme “*jīva Brahmaibo nā para*”) there remains no difference between *ātman* and *Brahman*. The discovery of our psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha* lays the threshold of such ultimate spiritual discovery. So we can say

³⁵² The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, “Psychic and Spiritual Education”, p. 128-129

following The Mother that Sri Aurobindo's psychic education serves as the basis of the spiritual education.³⁵³

Actually Sri Aurobindo's spiritual education truly shows us the path of human beings arising to the ultimate level of the superman. And when man considers his inner possibility as superman, according to The Mother, by realizing his identity as none the less but God himself, then this serves our dream of coming down the Supermind upon the earthen level truly possible and the result is Life Divine for all.³⁵⁴ Hence spiritual education truly stands as the gateway of Life Divine.

But again we have to remember that the road to reach towards Life Divine is not very smooth. In my view, men can easily serve the goals of physical education, vital education and even of mental education. But the journey towards Life Divine via the roads of psychic education and spiritual education (this journey is somewhat inward in nature) is very difficult to cope with. However as assured by Sri Aurobindo it is not impossible to reach the goal, but till now we don't have enough example of superman who can bring down the Supermind upon the earthen level just like Bhagirath call upon Ganga. Still it remains impossible as a utopia to our commonsense.

At the concluding part I am discussing a controversy regarding Aurobindian thesis of education. That controversy is related to the question: is Aurobindian thesis of

³⁵³ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Psychic and Spiritual Education", p. 127

³⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 131

education preaching for individualism or socialism? Let me make this position clear. It is thought, in individualism, that the main aim of education is to enhance the mental growth of students. In this way education has enormous influence over individual life. Whereas, according to socialistic theory of education, education has a deep impact over the entire society. If we go deeply into the educational thesis advocated by Sri Aurobindo then we will discover that he considered that education has not only deep impact over individual life but also over the social life. His theory of integral education actually shows us the way to be integrated in individual life where the individual can consider himself as an immediate part of his society. If the individual, according to Sri Aurobindo, through the medium of education, can discover his true identity then there will remain no chance to discriminate between him and other people living in the same society. Education is considered by him as the process of evolution from ignorance to knowledge for both the individual and also the society. Society cannot remain without its individuals; hence social growth, via the means of education, has to be dependent on individual growth. So Sri Aurobindo's theory of education is free from the influence of individualism and as well as of socialism as it combines them both.

In his educational thesis Sri Aurobindo always concentrated on the development of the psychic being, as it is the innermost hidden self of an individual. Here we can recall Freud's thesis of Id or subconscious mental sides of the human beings. Freud's subconscious mental state is that it can be awoken from its dogmatic

slumber when we get awareness about it.³⁵⁵ According to the Psychoanalysis theory of Sigmund Freud, our subconscious mind contains mainly primitive urges that our conscious mind bars us to admit that could be revealed in our dreams. Sri Aurobindo's psychic being is also just like that as it can also be awoken by realizing the touch of the Absolute Being. But Sri Aurobindo's psychic being is not subconscious; rather conscious in nature unlike Freud. The awakening of this psychic being is important for his metaphysics also as in the prayer of this inner being the Supreme Spirit i.e. *Sachchidanada* can become bound to come up to the earthen plane of the practical world. And the educational theory of Sri Aurobindo, mainly concerning psychic education, truly performs its own duty to accustom us with the existence of the psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha*. The training of the *Chaitya Purusha* (*Caitya Puruṣa*) is very much important for Sri Aurobindo's educational doctrine as it is the primary source to discover the Real 'I' hidden within everyone.

When we compare between the educational theories of Gandhi and Aurobindo then we will discover that Gandhi also, like Tagore and Aurobindo, gave importance on the discovery of Real Man via the means of education. The true aim of education, according to Gandhi, is to know the self or the *atman*, which is akin to knowing the *Truth*, and realizing the God.³⁵⁶ Hence Gandhi's system of education also includes the search for *Truth* like his other theories. His social-political theory was also

³⁵⁵ Freud, Sigmund, *The Unconscious*, "In Defence of the Unconscious", p. 50

³⁵⁶ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, "Volume Six: The Voice of Truth", p. 108

concentrated towards this ultimate search for Truth or *satya*. This search for Truth or *satya* is quite similar to the ultimate search of the self or *ātman* as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. However if we think deeply then Sri Aurobindo never searched for *Satya* or truth in his educational thesis like Gandhi. This search towards Truth or *satya* in Gandhi's theory of education is undoubtedly his uniqueness. The road to reach towards the true self of an individual is somewhat spiritual in nature in the view of Sri Aurobindo. In the writings of The Mother we notice the explanation of Sri Aurobindo's hidden goal where she clearly said that when our self-surrender in the feet of God would be so complete and 'integral' then our human lives naturally would be transformed into divine lives by his grace.³⁵⁷ Life Divine is the means of realizing the true self of an individual as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.

Critics thought Tagorean educational thesis is much more appealing in nature than that of Sri Aurobindo. Let me explain it. Sri Aurobindo's thesis seems unappealing to common masses, because mainly of its language and linguistic use. He encouraged the use of mother-tongue as a medium of learning³⁵⁸ but we unfortunately do not get any such chance to be acquainted with his theory of education in Bengali. For that reason, perhaps, common people do not become acquainted with his educational doctrine. His thesis remains familiar only to few enlightened people. The reason behind this may be his extreme command over foreign languages, e.g. Greek, Latin etc whose frequent usage with English made

³⁵⁷ The Mother, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Psychic and Spiritual Education", p. 128-129

³⁵⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "Simultaneous and Successive Teaching", p. 33-34

his theory much complicated to comprehend. On the contrary, Tagore used Bengali as a medium of his educational theory. Therefore, even though the rhythmic flows, the poetic touches, the idealistic thought-waves were also common in his theory like Sri Aurobindo; he could easily win over the heart of the educated as well as uneducated masses for this simple reason. This is the reason which makes the name of Tagore familiar to all Bengali family, whereas Sri Aurobindo remained well-known within the circle of enlightened persons. This is certainly the flaw of Sri Aurobindo's theory of education.

Tagore as well as Gandhi also admitted the necessity of physical, vital, mental levels of education of Indian youths. But the clear explanation of psychic and spiritual types of educations which was hinted by Sri Aurobindo and clearly advocated by The Mother was his own uniqueness. Tagorean and Gandhian model of education also serves the aim of improving the human soul via the medium of spiritual education among Indian pupils. Like Sri Aurobindo, Tagore also believed that through the medium of education we can develop our physical, mental and eventually the spiritual aspects.³⁵⁹ Gandhi hinted about the existence of psychic education but failed to draw its distinction with that of spiritual education. In Gandhian view, self-realization of human being, which is known to be the way of psychic realization to Sri Aurobindo, is akin to the realization of God or spiritual realization.³⁶⁰ But in Sri Aurobindo's doctrine, we can discover clear-cut

³⁵⁹ Sharma, R. N., *Textbook of Educational Philosophy*, p. 320

³⁶⁰ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, "Volume Six: The Voice of Truth", p. 503

distinction between both of these two levels of realization as in psychic transformation, according to him, man's search for his own identity while in spiritual transformation man's search for God has cease to an end. In this reason Sri Aurobindo's theory of education seems truly integral or *purna* as it aims at the integration of the body, life, mind, psyche as well as soul-factors of the individual unlike Gandhi and Tagore.

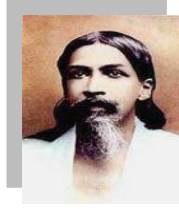
By the way we must admit that Sri Aurobindo's thesis of national education is not merely much more fascinating than others, but also much more engrossed and complete in nature than that of other contemporary thinkers, like Gandhi as well as Tagore. Gandhi in his educational concept mentioned about the spiritual kind of education but failed to explain its nature properly. Tagore was much more explicative about this than that of Gandhi. But he also never dreamt of the psychic education just like Sri Aurobindo did. Tagore wanted to use education as a means of developing the true self of the individual (Real Man) but failed to explain it as a means of reconciliation between the individual souls with that of the Divine soul. However the problem is that most thinkers thought-level stops within the arena of our divine union with the *Brahman*. According to most of them, liberation is the ultimate end and education serves as the medium. But Sri Aurobindo goes one step further. He introduced not only the concept of the ascent of the manhood to Supermanhood, but also the descent of the *Sachchidanada* upon the earthen level to make the life of human beings the Life Divine. Education, in his view, does not end with our attainment of liberation but also to the Supramental descent on the earth.

Sri Aurobindo's educational thesis has become special than that of others in this context.

Another fascinating idea about Aurobindian thesis of national education is that his theory transcends the boundary of nationalism and superbly includes universalism or internationalism. The individual acquires the central part of Sri Aurobindo's scheme of education but his educational thesis beautifully unravels the existence of greater humanity within an individual life by gradually developing his physical, vital, mental, psychic and spiritual domains. According to him, through the proper kind of education the body, mind and the soul factors have to be developed in such a way so that the individuals residing within a nation can truly realize their immediate connection with the 'ascending mind and soul of humanity'.³⁶¹ Moreover his national educational thesis assimilates the past glory of India with the goodness of Europe for building the true type of national temperament.³⁶² Hence for understanding the uniqueness of his thesis we have to be free from any pre-conceived bias concerning the word 'national education'.

³⁶¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL)*, Vol. 17, p. 204

³⁶² Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL)*, Vol. 1, p. 717-718



Fifth Chapter

The Village Reconstruction and Palli Samiti

To discuss the notion of *swaraj* from Sri Aurobindo's perspective, we have to understand first that for gaining *swaraj* we have to prepare our villages first. For this above reason Sri Aurobindo explained that 'the village Samiti is the seed of Swaraj'.³⁶³ Village reconstruction is thought to be a part of national self-help and national self-development scheme by him. Now if we investigate properly, then we could find out that the actual aim of the British rule was to destroy the social strength of India. How this foreign rule gradually destroyed Indian social life-structure, is vividly depicted in Sri Aurobindo's own writings. Sri Aurobindo's theory of village reconstruction is also not irrelevant in this respect.

For the revival of our country Sri Aurobindo dreamt of reconstructing our villages. What is the necessity of the reconstruction of villages in the context of nation-building? In its answer we can say following Sri Aurobindo that villages are the base of any nation and without developing villages we cannot develop any nation.³⁶⁴ A nation is made up of several smaller units and village is the smallest unit among them. Thus it seems that as villages remain as the basis of an entire

³⁶³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 884

³⁶⁴ Ibid, "The Village and the Nation", p. 739

nation, so we have to raise the cry for *swaraj* from the villages before applying it in the broad field of nation. *Swaraj* of nation is impossible in his view if we cannot achieve the *swaraj* of village. As a larger unit has to depend upon its smaller unit the nation also has to depend upon villages. In *swaraj* our main intention was to make the nation self-sufficient and self-reliant and for doing so we have to reconstruct its smallest unit i.e. the village. Hence village *samitis*, according to Sri Aurobindo, as the starting point of *swaraj*, could be appropriately mentioned as the means of bringing village *swaraj* or *gram swaraj*.³⁶⁵

Gandhian model of village reconstruction was also somewhat similar to that of Sri Aurobindo. In his opinion villages should be developed as complete republic. In his own words ‘My idea of village *Swaraj* is that it is a complete republic’.³⁶⁶ This Gandhian notion of village republic is quite akin to Aurobindian model of *gram swaraj*. In Gandhian view villages should be self-reliant in nature like that of Sri Aurobindo. However his dissimilarity is that he considered that such villages have to be based upon the idea of nonviolence or *ahimsa*³⁶⁷ which is certainly not advocated by Sri Aurobindo.

According to Sri Aurobindo, for attaining *swaraj*, we need to advance our national self-help or national self-development programs along with our on-going national movements in the context of villages. Thus the formation of *palli samitis* must

³⁶⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Palli Samiti”, p. 884

³⁶⁶ Shriman Narayan (ed.), *The Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume-Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 345

³⁶⁷ *Ibid*, p. 344

remain as our practice of *swaraj* within the limited boundary of village. In the Kishoregunj Speech³⁶⁸ Sri Aurobindo considered that in this respect Bengal has to guide India.³⁶⁹ *Swaraj* is that policy, in his view, which will begin from villages before applying it in the wide context of a nation. And according to Sri Aurobindo Bengal youths had to take the initiative to make it popular in the villages of the then undivided Bengal.

A. Sri Aurobindo on Village Reconstruction: Gram Swaraj:

Sri Aurobindo's theory regarding village reconstruction is called as *gram swaraj*. However the word '*gram swaraj*' is taken by him in the sense of 'the self-dependent and self-sufficient village organism'.³⁷⁰ He wants to introduce this concept for all-round development of village necessary for the attainment of the political liberty of India. Let us go through Sri Aurobindo's explanation for advocating village reconstruction³⁷¹ which will thoroughly uncover the uniqueness of his thesis:

Firstly, according to him, a nation under its own rule lives in the natural condition of living; but when it is dominated by the foreign rule then it has to remain bound under artificial or non-natural condition of living. In a natural condition a nation grows from within; while the foreign rule imposing control over it leads towards

³⁶⁸ Kishoregunj area is now situated in Mymensingh district, Bangladesh; this Kishoregunj speech was later incorporated as an article named 'Palli Samiti' in the book *Bande Mataram* published from Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry in 1972.

³⁶⁹ 'Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 888

³⁷⁰ Ibid, p. 885

³⁷¹ Ibid, p. 884-885

disintegration and decay of the nation by stopping its natural growth process. The reason behind Sri Aurobindo's such expression is that every nation has its own cultural background, style of living, language structure etc; but when a foreign rule dominates over that nation then its own unique culture, language and life-style all are dominated by the foreign culture, language and life-style. This foreign style of living is totally suppressive over a nation's originality. So a nation's living under foreign rule is considered to be non-natural type of living by Sri Aurobindo. The same, according to Sri Aurobindo, happened in the case of pre-independent India and its villages.³⁷²

Secondly, according to him, village *samitis* are the seeds of *swaraj* as for making our nation politically independent we have to make its villages free and independent. Because, in his view, a nation is ultimately dependent upon its villages for its sustenance hence the freedom of villages is also desirable.³⁷³

Let me explain this. In pre-independent India Indians did not enjoy enough liberty to make any political decision. The British government at the then India had enacted several barbarous laws namely the Bengal Regulation Acts of 1812 and 1818, Vernacular Press Act of 1878, Newspaper Act of 1908, Press Act of 1910, Defense of India Act of 1915, Rowlatt Act of 1919, Defense of India Act of 1939 etc depriving the political rights of their Indian subjects. As villages are the roots of our Indian society so the villagers are also forced to live without any slight chance

³⁷² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 884

³⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 885

of enjoying their political liberty. As an example, villages of the then India were not allowed to have separate village courts to settle down their own disputes. In this context Sri Aurobindo truly predicted that for achieving the political liberty of a nation we have to gain the political freedom of its core i.e. the villages. No nation can be free unless its villages are free. Village reconstruction, in his view, serves as the gateway of achieving political freedom of a nation. This is the reason why Sri Aurobindo advocated for village *swaraj* so strongly.

Thirdly, according to Sri Aurobindo, if we want to achieve political independence of the then India then we should preach for the economic independence of its villages. No nation can be politically independent till it reach its economic independence and for achieving so it first has to make its villages self-sufficient and self-reliant. The foundation of Indian society lies in its villages. Therefore, according to Sri Aurobindo, if we want to attain *swaraj* then we should preach the concept of *gram swaraj* as its immediate counter-part.³⁷⁴

Let me explain it in my own words. The foreign invaders before 1947 for their own sake tried to destroy the sufficient life-structure of the Indian villages so that the economic self-sufficiency of India could be put to an end. They wanted to have open market for their local goods in India. The real motive behind this endeavor of destroying the self-reliance of Indian villages, as visualized by Sri Aurobindo, was to make India dependent upon the foreign economy for its own growth.³⁷⁵ Therefore

³⁷⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 885

³⁷⁵ *Ibid*, p. 884

Sri Aurobindo justly realized that for making our nation self-reliant and self-dependent we have to start this endeavor from the core of a nation, i.e. the villages. Villages are the basis of any national life. A nation cannot be politically free unless it obtains economic independence and this process should start at the core level i.e. the village level. If villages can be economically self-dependent, then the nation will also be economically self-dependent. He truly visualized that without the all round economic development of Indian villages India cannot obtain its political freedom. *Swaraj* of a nation, according to Sri Aurobindo, in the sense of political independence will be truly unavailable unless we can ensure *gram swaraj* in the sense of its economic independence.³⁷⁶ To de-thrown the British rule from India the making of its villages self-sufficient, thus, seemed so necessary to him in the context of pre-independent India.

Fourthly, according to Sri Aurobindo the *gram swaraj* is mandatory for the attainment of social freedom. Village reconstruction is the important part of national self-development scheme as conceived by him.³⁷⁷ He wanted to develop the villages for it seemed, to him, mandatory for the national self-help program. Most Indians, according to him, remain outside the reach of the cities as he rightly conceived that ‘India is still a nation of villagers, not of townsmen’.³⁷⁸ Hence in his view we cannot ignore the true demands of the social upliftment of the common Indian villages for the development of India in its true sense. According to him,

³⁷⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Palli Samiti”, p. 885

³⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 885

³⁷⁸ Ibid, “Back to the Land”, p. 731

India is destined to be free from the foreign servitude. And for achieving the political liberty, at first of all we have to prepare India to attain the social liberty from several calamities like rain, flood, poverty, lack of proper sanitation arrangements, health-oriented problems regarding malnutrition, dehydration etc. For achieving this social liberty we have to prepare our villages to act safe and secure by the help of its village reconstruction programs or *palli unnayan parikalpana*. Self-help and self-dependence schemes even considered by him as the first conditions of making a village self-reliant in the name of village *swaraj*.³⁷⁹

In this above way Sri Aurobindo's theory regarding *gram swaraj* helps to explore the uniqueness of his thesis to us.

B. Necessities of Village Reconstruction:

Sri Aurobindo's village reconstruction theory is fondly called as village *swaraj* by him.³⁸⁰ The main purpose behind preaching for this village *swaraj* is to make the freedom of India all-round. Village is the core of any nation. India is not at all an exception of that. A nation is not made up of its metropolitan cities only, but also of its remote villages. Hence the development of a nation is dependent not only upon its metropolitan cities, but also on its villages. The development of its villages depend on the all round development of health conditions of villagers, sanitation system of villages, establishment of *Panchayat* system as independent village bodies, advancement of education system along with the economic and social

³⁷⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p.886

³⁸⁰ Ibid, p. 884

developments etc. Gandhi correctly mentioned that village *swaraj* is actually a complete republic,³⁸¹ independent of any external control or domination of the nation. A village, in Gandhian thought, should be self-reliant in such a way that no foreign rule can be able to break the backbone of it. Sri Aurobindo's theory regarding village *swaraj* is nothing exceptional than that.

We could discover two necessities of village reconstruction as following Sri Aurobindo.³⁸²

The first one is that for the true attainment of *swaraj*, according to Sri Aurobindo, the political sense of the masses needs to be awakened.³⁸³ In a democratic state the villages remain as the core of the nation. However, according to him, without evoking the political sense of common masses, the dream of attaining *swaraj* cannot be fulfilled at all. The sense of *swaraj* should be awaken in the village people. For giving political education to the masses; we first of all try to uplift their economic and social conditions. Let me try to make the position clear. Politics is truly secondary problem in the context of other significant problems regarding the life-structure and earning livelihood of the villagers. An educated person can easily grasp the necessity of attaining *swaraj* or political independence but it is very tough to convince uneducated masses to realize the necessity of *swaraj* as village men mainly deal with their problems regarding livelihood most ferociously than that of

³⁸¹ Shriman Narayan, *Selected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume-Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 345

³⁸² Ibid, p. 886-888

³⁸³ Ibid, p. 886

related to politics. If we have to be indulged into the thought of gaining daily wages then we should not be bothered about the happenings of politics. So for making the masses politically aware we must first ensure their earning for livelihood, the upliftment in their economic and health conditions and the sanction of goods related with their comforts as the primary necessities of village life. Hence the question of *gram swaraj* should be indulged with the concept of self-development of villages. National self-development scheme is bound to be failed if we cannot ensure the development of villages. Therefore village reconstruction seems to him compatible for evoking the political sense of rural India but only after ensuring their economic freedom. Even after gaining economic freedom, in his conception, it will not be easy for the uneducated masses to realize the necessity of the attainment of political freedom of a nation. Hence, according to him, we have to make them first prepared to achieve village *swaraj* and then gradually understand the relevance of national *swaraj* ‘through the perception of Swaraj in the village’.³⁸⁴ To develop this political feeling among villagers village reconstruction model is utterly helpful. Sri Aurobindo, being a true visionary of his age, realized the problem clearly.

Actually Sri Aurobindo’s main intention was to make India as the spiritual guide of other nations.³⁸⁵ He always gave tremendous emphasis over the ancient glory and spiritual excellence of India. He dreamt to regain that ancient Indian glory and to teach the materialistic world a way towards spirituality following the example of India. And for doing this, India’s political mastery seems very much essential to

³⁸⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Palli Samiti”, p. 886

³⁸⁵ Ibid, “Swaraj and Coming Anarchy”, p. 731

him. However for making a whole nation politically developed, we have to develop the political sense of the masses. Most people of a nation reside in villages, so we should develop the political sense of the villagers at first. By the improvement of village life-structure, we can be able to develop the life-structure of the entire India. This is the reason behind Sri Aurobindo' advocating for the awakening of political senses among Indian masses living in villages.

The second necessity in Aurobindian doctrine is somewhat related with the concept of communalism. According to him, this reconstruction of village *samiti* will be helpful enough to destroy the separative attitude between Hindu and Muslim races.³⁸⁶ It also seems helpful to him in uniting them not only from the political stand-point, but also from the bottom of their heart as he clearly advocated for the unity of the heart.³⁸⁷ The foreign rule truly destroyed the Hindu-Muslim unity as it conceived this one as a great threat against its rule of two decades over India. The ancient Hindu and Muslim eras were different from this British era not only in their pattern of thought and culture, but also in their intrinsic nature. The most Hindu and Muslim kings (*rājās*) and aristocrats (*zamindārs*), in the ancient time, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, realized their unity with the ruled persons and so mutual love, trust and companionship sustain between both the ruler and the ruled. They strictly maintained the unity between both the Hindu and the Muslim race as it seemed mandatory for their own self-preservation. But the foreigners advocate diversity between these two sects; so that they will become powerless by constant fighting

³⁸⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 887

³⁸⁷ *Ibid*, p. 887

and quarrelling among them and never could even try to preach for the political liberty of India. But if we can include both these two sects equally in the massive work of village reconstruction then they have to feel strong bonding with each other. The communal anger and distrust will be, in such a way, according to Sri Aurobindo, normally decreased day by day. Thus, in his view, by spreading communal love by sharing every work, happiness and custom little bit with each other, Hindu-Muslim unity could be achieved; and when religious as well as social unity will be attained in this way, then the political unity of entire India cannot remain far behind.³⁸⁸ However it is very unfortunate that even being the communal unity among Hindus and Muslims truly desirable in the context of today's India it fails to be practicalized in reality.

How village reconstruction endeavor can help to achieve the so desired Hindu-Muslim unity in India? The answer is quite simple in nature. In any Indian village both Hindus and Muslims should remain together and for the development of the village we need the help from both of these sects. We cannot reject the help of Muslims for the all round development of the village will not be possible if we do not give them opportunities to work with the Hindu sects of the village. The same goes in the case of the Hindus. We cannot achieve the social unity among villagers if we are constantly trying to differentiate between them in the context of sects, religions, customs, cultures etc. Village is the core of any nation and hence *swaraj* has to start from villages. *Swaraj* here does not mean political independence, but the

³⁸⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 888

social unity. So for achieving *swaraj* in the grass-root level, i.e. the village level, we first of all try to destroy mutual hatred, distrust, aloofness, separative attitudes existing among the two major religious sects of the Indian community namely the Hindus and the Muslims. It has to be noted here that the ancient Indian society had lost its glory due to the unwanted difference between the four classes, i.e. *Brahmin* (*Brāhmin*), *Kshatriya* (*Kṣatriya*), *Vaishya* (*Vaiśya*) and *Sudra* (*Śūdra*). Sri Aurobindo, being the true evaluator of the cause of downfall of Indian society at the ancient age, was very careful not to repeat the same mistake with the Hindus and the Muslims.

Formation of village *samiti* is therefore urgently necessary in the view of Sri Aurobindo. Village *samitis* are, therefore, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, the conditions to be fulfilled for the achievement of *swaraj* or political freedom.³⁸⁹ For achieving the political freedom of a nation, in his view, the arousal of political sense of common masses along with the most desired and even the most controversial Hindu-Muslim unity seems mandatory. Furthermore *palli samitis* are the criterion to make these two essential goals related to *swaraj* possible.

In brief, this is Sri Aurobindo's thesis regarding the necessities of village reformation.

³⁸⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 888

C. Village and Nation:

Every discussion regarding Sri Aurobindo's village reconstruction model starts with his concept of nation. A nation should not exist without its villages. However, in this context, we can search for the answers of the most significant questions: what is the relation between a nation and its villages? What is the name of the village reconstruction model advocated by him?

To discover the true picture regarding the relationship between the village and the nation we have to mention that, according to Sri Aurobindo, a nation is 'always rooted in its villages' and that is completely true even in the case of India.³⁹⁰ He called the village reconstruction model as apex system. In Sri Aurobindo's apex system³⁹¹ regarding village reconstruction villages remain at the basis of any nation, while the nation remains at the top of all. Village stands as the cell-body of a nation just like a cell to a body. He beautifully compared a nation with that of a body. A body is made up of enormous cells. In the similar way a nation is also made up of villages which are known as the cells or cores of a nation-body. For the sustenance and well-being of the body we need to nourish and nurture its cells. Similarly for the proper development of any nation we have to nurture its cells i.e. villages.³⁹² India is not at all an exception to this rule. Thus, following Sri Aurobindo, we can

³⁹⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Back to the Land", p. 732

³⁹¹ Ibid, "Palli Samiti", p. 884-885

³⁹² Ibid, p. 884

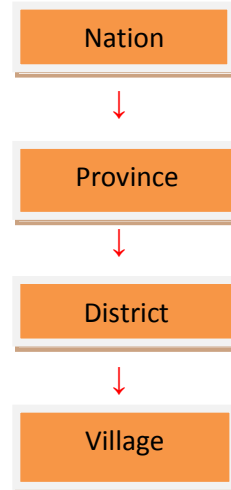
claim that as villages stand for the foundation of an entire nation so we have to raise the voice for *swaraj* from the villages.³⁹³

Now what are the steps of village reconstruction model advocated by Sri Aurobindo? The village is the core or seed-state of every nation. Within the village there remain several groups of men united to fulfill their common group purpose. Village must be the subordinate part of the district, each district must live as a subordinate part of the province, and the province in its turn that of the nation. It is known to be the apex system of village reconstruction model as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. In his opinion, to make the growth of a nation a healthy growth and not an artificial construction we must begin at the bottom and work to the top of that system. Let us try to understand his position. A nation, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, stands at the apex or top of every other subordinate group, be it districts, provinces or villages.³⁹⁴ The national development thus stands on the development of its immediate subordinate group i.e. the province. The provincial development in the mean time depends upon the development of its immediate subordinate group i.e. the district. The development of the district following the same process depends upon the development of its immediate subordinate group i.e. village. In this way, following the apex system of Sri Aurobindo, we can say that the development of a nation has to be based upon the development of its smallest unit i.e. village. In this way he beautifully described the relationship between a nation and the village as its smallest unit.

³⁹³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 885

³⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 885

The apex system of village reconstruction model of Sri Aurobindo can be as follows:³⁹⁵



The uniqueness of Aurobindian village reconstruction model is that his model stands bi-linear (two sided) in comparison with that of Mahatma Gandhi. Let me make my position clear. In Sri Aurobindo's view, the nation and the village both has to depend upon each other for their own existence and none can be considered as self-sufficient without the help of the other. This theory is quite different than that of Gandhi who was sure about the self-sufficiency of village instead of nation. To him, village, being self-sufficient, should not depend upon nation but not vice versa.³⁹⁶ So we can claim that in Gandhian theory of village reconstruction the

³⁹⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 885

³⁹⁶ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 345

relationship between nation and village is linear (one-sided) instead of bi-linear relationship like that of Sri Aurobindo.

D. Village Reconstruction Procedure: relation with Swaraj:

Village reconstruction, according to Sri Aurobindo, is one of the important organs of national self-help movement.³⁹⁷ For the development of a nation, the village also has to be developed. So village *samiti* appears as an indispensable instrument of the national development procedure. What is the process of the so-called development of *palli samiti*? In its answer we have to quote from Sri Aurobindo – ‘It is to set up village schools in which our children will grow up as good citizens and patriots to live for their country and not for themselves or for the privilege of dependent life in a dependent nation. It is to take up the work of arbitration by which we shall recover control of the administration of justice, of self-protection, of village sanitation, of small local public works, so that the life of the village may again be self-reliant and self-sufficient, free from the habit of dependence rooted in the soil. Self-help and self-dependence, the first conditions of Swaraj, depend for their organisation on the village Samiti.’³⁹⁸

In Sri Aurobindo’s idea the village reconstruction procedure is as follows:

Firstly, in his opinion we have to set up village schools where Indian children can get enough opportunities to be the good citizens of India.³⁹⁹ A nation is made up of

³⁹⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Palli Samiti”, p. 885

³⁹⁸ Ibid, p. 886

³⁹⁹ Ibid, p. 886

its citizens. Children are future citizens of any nation and so also of India. Education is the prime requirement of every children of India and for it we have to set up schools even in remotest villages. Mahatma Gandhi also gave tremendous importance over village education like Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁰⁰

Secondly, according to him, we have to set up village arbitration courts so that we can reject the foreign judicial system where Indians never get justice.⁴⁰¹ The difference between guilty people due to the color of their skin was well popular practice in foreign courts. So to boycott them we need to set up our own arbitration courts even in villages for getting justice. Another reason behind Sri Aurobindo's preaching for village arbitration court is to make our villages self-reliant so that we should not depend upon the courts of big metropolitan cities for all the times. With the help of village courts we can settle down our local disputes by ourselves. In this context we can discover the similarity of his thought with Gandhian *Panchayat* system. However Gandhian *Panchayat* system unlike Sri Aurobindo concentrates also over legislature and executives duties along with the judicial one.⁴⁰²

Thirdly, we have to work for making village health conditions better so that the villagers cannot be dependent upon the big metropolitan cities for getting medical help as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. Village cleanliness and village sanitation system are important aspects regarding the improvement of village health

⁴⁰⁰ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 346

⁴⁰¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Palli Samiti”, p. 886

⁴⁰² Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 346

conditions.⁴⁰³ Indeed we have to continue the habit of hygiene among village people so that we can fight against any disease.

Fourthly, according to Sri Aurobindo, we have to do some local public works with all villagers so that the sense of mutual trust, love and companionship can develop and it will help us to gain national unity on the bigger arena of politics.⁴⁰⁴ As village is the smallest unit of a nation, hence in his view, we should practice village unity for getting national unity.

Fifthly, according to him, we have to make the villagers self-dependent and self-reliant so that they cannot depend upon the big metropolitan cities for earning their livelihood. India is truly evaluated by him as made of not only its metropolitan cities but also of its villages.⁴⁰⁵ Therefore self-sufficiency of village is mandatory to achieve self-sufficiency of the nation. We can get a similar picture from Gandhian thesis of village government which is called by him as ‘perfect democracy based upon individual freedom’.⁴⁰⁶

Now while explaining the quotation taken from Sri Aurobindo we have to understand that, in his view, *swaraj* stands in the context of village as self-dependence or independence in every aspects of life but not only in the sense of political independence. So we have to make it clear that Aurobindian theory of

⁴⁰³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Palli Samiti”, p. 886

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid, p. 886

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid, “Back to the Land”, p. 732

⁴⁰⁶ Shriman Narayan (eds.), *The Selected Writings of Mahatma Gandhi*, Volume – Six: *The Voice of Truth*, p. 346

gram swaraj is not only political independence of the villages but the independence of the village men from all kinds of dependence, be it social or economic. This is the vast sense of Aurobindian *gram swaraj*.

The uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's theory of village reconstruction is that it helps us, according to him, to attain *swaraj*, be it in its political sense or in its spiritual sense. National aspect of *swaraj* will be completely unavailable until we touch it in the limited perspective of *gram swaraj*. Political independence of a nation, in the political sense of *swaraj*, cannot be possible until all people living even in its remotest villages will gain liberty from political slavery. And if we want to take the word '*swaraj*' in the spiritual sense, i.e. liberation or *mokṣa*, then also we can say that the attainment of *mokṣa* will be impossible if others living in the same society, village or nation, are living in total distress. Hence *swaraj* in the sense of political liberty cannot be achieved unless true political liberty of common villagers could be achieved; and in the same way *swaraj* as *mokṣa* or liberation, in its spiritual sense, cannot be attained unless the collective salvation of all people could be attained. In brief this is the relation between Sri Aurobindo's theories of village reconstruction and *swaraj*.

E. Ways towards Gram Swaraj: Spirituality Inherent:

Sri Aurobindo beautifully incorporated the spiritual sense of *swaraj* with that of village reconstruction. *Swaraj*, according to Sri Aurobindo, is not only a political movement. It is considered to be the *sanatana dharma* or the eternal religion.⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, "The Ideal of the Karmayogin", p. 2

Swaraj is a movement, as viewed by him, which will enhance the human mental level to the divine level. *Swaraj* is a way by which we can uplift human life to that of a Life Divine as *swaraj* is considered to be ‘*sva-mahimni*’ by him.⁴⁰⁸ The word *sva-mahimni* comes from the *Vedas* which means to understand one’s (*sva*) own true nature (*mahimā*) i.e. to understand that there is no difference between *jīvātman* and *Paramatman* (*Paramātman*).⁴⁰⁹ A man exists in a group; hence this feeling of inner union with the Divine makes him feel the pains and sufferings of others remaining in the same group, be it the nation or village. As villages are the core of a nation hence for making men living in the same nation free from suffering, we have to try first to end the sufferings of people living in the same village. Hence we have to practice *swaraj*, remembering about its spiritual overtone, according to Sri Aurobindo, even in the background of village atmosphere. From here takes birth Sri Aurobindo’s famous principle of *gram swaraj*.

Let me make the position more clear. According to Sri Aurobindo, a person who gets liberation or *mokṣa* should try to make the lives of others liberated in such a way so that all of them conjointly try to pray to the Supermind to come upon the earthen level. But what is the procedure of doing so? According to the *Vedas* and the *Vedanta* there are two types of *mokṣa* – *videha mukti* i.e. liberation from life-cycle and *jīvan mukti* i.e. liberation attained even when one’s life-cycle is remaining. There are three types of *karma* or actions working through a person’s whole life-cycle – they are *prārabdhha karma*, *sañcita karma* and *sañciyamāna*

⁴⁰⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Justice Mitter and Swaraj”, p. 513

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 513

karma. *Prārabdhha karma* is the action of past whose consequence a person has started enjoying. *Sañcita karma* is the action of present whose consequence is gathering together and will start to be enjoyed by the person after the ending of enjoying *prārabdhha karma*. *Sañciyamāna karma* is the action of the future whose consequence is still collecting throughout the whole life-cycle of that person. A person, after attaining *mokṣa* or liberation, becomes liberated from the suffering of his *sañcita* and *sañciyamāna karmas*. But till the end of the suffering of his *prārabdhha karma* he has to live his life. The person who is liberated but cannot be free from his life-cycle is called as a *jīvanmukta puruṣa (puruṣa)* i.e. the person who got liberation but continues to live.

In the *Gita* that type of *puruṣa (puruṣa)* is known to be *s̥hita prajñā*⁴¹⁰ where the person, after liberation, has to perform duties for others without any desire in the sense of *niṣkāma karma*. *Karma* or action, according to ancient Indian scriptures, can be done in two ways – with the desire of enjoying the consequence (*sakāma*) and without the desire of enjoying the consequence (*niṣkāma*). A liberated person cannot perform any action with the desire of enjoying the consequence or *sakāma karma*. A liberated person or *mukta puruṣa (puruṣa)* should perform his duties towards others belonging to the same society without the desire of enjoying the consequence of his action. He has to perform so that others belonging to the same

⁴¹⁰ In the *Gita* while discussing about *s̥hita prajñā* Sri Krishna told Arjuna:

tasmād yasya mahābāho nigrhītāni sarvaśaḥ

Indriyāṅindriyārthebhyastasya prajñā pratiṣṭhitā ||2/68||

[The person who is completely free from the desires of the palate and whose sense-organs also concentrate themselves from the every kind of control of the desires is called as *s̥hita prajñā*.]

society can also be prepared for attaining *mokṣa*. In the *Gita* this stage is called as *niṣkāma karma yoga*. While Sri Aurobindo called this stage of individual salvation as the basic starting point of collective salvation.

This stage, where a *jīvanmukta puruṣa* (*puruṣa*) has to perform his duty in the sense of duty towards others in the society, can be compared with Kant's Deontological theory well-known as the duties for duties' sake as both of them gave emphasis over the performance of duty instead of consequences. The life of Goutam Budhha is the perfect example of such liberation where even after getting *mokṣa* he tried hard to make others liberated. This stage is also known as *lokasamgraha* in the *Gita*.⁴¹¹ A person, who works for *lokasamgraha* in the above way, has to prepare the entire society for attaining *mokṣa* collectively. In the concept of Sri Aurobindo, unlike the *Vedas* and *Vedanta*, the word '*mokṣa*' or '*mukti*' is not used in the sense of individual salvation, rather in the sense of collective salvation as his main dream is always making the Life Divine. The ancient Indian scriptures like the *Vedas* and the *Vedanta* ends its ultimate discussion with the concept of individual salvation, while Sri Aurobindo goes further with the concept of collective salvation.

⁴¹¹ To explain the concept of *lokasamgraha* Sri Krishna told Arjuna:

yadācarati śreṣṭhastadtadevetaro janāḥ

sa yat pramāṇam kurute lokastadanuvartate ||3/21||

[The person who has true knowledge about the division of *guṇa* and *karma* with that of *ātmā*, i.e. who knows that his works will not concentrate in his soul, can work without any desire and hence the consequences of his actions never let him captivated again under the bondage of life-cycle. Other persons will follow his footsteps. Whatever standard he sets, the rest of the world will follow.]

But what is the connection between the concepts of Sri Aurobindo's collective salvation with that of his *gram (grām) swaraj*? In the concept of collective salvation it is seen that salvation or *mokṣa*, according to Sri Aurobindo, is to be attained not only by a human being but also by the entire humanity.⁴¹² For the dream of making collective salvation possible the development of the life of Indian villages is an urgent need. If our dream is just to achieve individual salvation then we have no need to develop the villages. Men are social beings and they cannot live separately. They live collectively in villages. If we cannot upgrade the lives of the villagers collectively then our dream of collective salvation, as dreamt by Sri Aurobindo, could not be possible in reality. For making Supermind bound to come down the earth we have to upgrade the lives of the villagers as village reconstruction, in the sense of *gram swaraj*, serves as the basis of *swaraj*. In this above way we can consider *gram swaraj* as the starting point of Sri Aurobindo's dream of Life Divine.

In the concluding part I am focusing on some problems regarding Aurobindian thesis of village reconstruction. One of such is related to the concept of communalism advocated by Sri Aurobindo in his village reconstruction theory. Peter Heehs in his book *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism* criticized Sri Aurobindo as according to him Sri Aurobindo never showed any positive steps to include Muslims in the national agitation against British imperialism.⁴¹³ In his view, Sri Aurobindo like Vivekananda stressed upon several topics related to Hinduism;

⁴¹² Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo and The Mother On Education*, "A Preface of National Education", p. 16

⁴¹³ Heehs, Peter, *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History*, p. 114

e.g. the essential spirituality of the Hindu race, the superiority of Hindu religion above all and Hinduism's great world mission.⁴¹⁴ However we cannot accept this point of view. The Hinduism, advocated by Sri Aurobindo, is the paradigm of *sanatana dharma* and his theory of *sanatana dharma* embraces all religions including Islam.⁴¹⁵ Hence when Sri Aurobindo told us about the supremacy of the Hindu religion then the word 'Hinduism' stood as *sanatana dharma* or the wider sense of Hinduism. We should not limit his Hinduism in the narrow sense. Heehs even considered Sri Aurobindo as an opportunist who turned 'attention to the Hindu-Muslim question only when social or political conflict threatened to disturb the united progress of the national movement'.⁴¹⁶ This criticism of Sri Aurobindo by Peter Heehs for not advocating the Hindu-Muslim unity in its true sense is absurd. According to Sri Aurobindo, in pre-independent India the Hindus first realized the necessity of communal unity and the relevance of political agitation against the British rule.⁴¹⁷ But it is true that the communal unity desired by him is not religious or political, instead somewhat psychological in nature as he wants the Hindu and Muslim communities to be united from heart.⁴¹⁸

Is the village reconstruction thesis of Sri Aurobindo just a theory or it becomes applicable in practice? We have to admit that the thesis remains mostly inapplicable

⁴¹⁴ Heehs, Peter, *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History*, p. 117

⁴¹⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, "The Ideal of the Karmayogin", p. 5

⁴¹⁶ Heehs, Peter, *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History*, p. 114

⁴¹⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 887

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 888

by him. His several articles as “Palli Samiti”, “Back to the Land” and “Village and Nation” published in the book *Bande Mataram*⁴¹⁹ are just pointing towards the problems related to village reconstruction or national self-help program but fail to demonstrate it broadly so that it can satisfy our curiosity in this regard.

Many critics claimed that Sri Aurobindo’s village reconstruction theory is much more theoretical than that of Tagore and Gandhi. Both Tagore and Gandhi went to the grass-route level to implement their village reconstruction model unlike Sri Aurobindo. The bread-labor theory (introduced by Gandhi) and wage-earning theory (introduced by Tagore)⁴²⁰, according to the critics, are missing in Sri Aurobindo. Tagorean and Gandhian attitude towards the village reconstruction problem seems much more realistic than that of Sri Aurobindo due to their application in reality.

While comparing with Tagorean and Gandhian models of village reconstruction Aurobindian model seems incomplete in application. Tagore and Gandhi both at least tried to implement their village reconstruction model respectively in *Santiniketan* and *Sabarmati* ashram. But Sri Aurobindo nested the responsibility of village reconstruction on the shoulders of Bengal youths.⁴²¹ He never tried to implement it personally. Some can argue that his theory was actually employed in Pondicherry ashram but the truth is that, if it at all could be done, it was done under

⁴¹⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Palli Samiti”, p. 884-888, “Back to the Land”, p. 732-735 & “Village and Nation”, p. 736-739

⁴²⁰ Elmhirst, Leonard K., *Poet and Plowman*, p. 582

⁴²¹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Palli Samiti”, p. 888

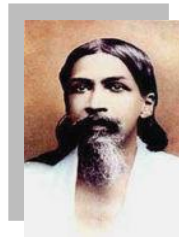
the observance of The Mother where his influence was definitely there but nothing more than that. In this respect we can say that the problem with his theory of village reconstruction is indeed related to its inapplicability.

Village reconstruction, according to me, is the poorest side of Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought. His other theories related to *swaraj*, boycott, resistance and national education has inherent specialty to be discussed about, but the complexity behind his thesis of village reconstruction is indeed very poorly developed. He had never defined his village reconstruction theory like his other theories in details. He just showed the way of its utilization in the context of rural Bengal at the then India. In my view this is the main drawback of Sri Aurobindo's theory of village reconstruction.

Let us try to concentrate on the question what is the reason of Sri Aurobindo's village reconstruction theory to be included into his social-political thought. The uniqueness of Sri Aurobindo's village reconstruction theory is that he understood the importance of village reconstruction as a necessary gateway of national reconstruction. Actually, in my view, Sri Aurobindo mainly emphasized over the notion of nation-building. He wanted, for this reason, to build the strong basis of its villages which is the pre-requisite of nation-building procedure. Just as charity begins at home so also nation-building starts with the trial of village-building. For making India free, in his view, from political bondage or political sickles we have to try first to make the Indian villages free. He gave the emphasis over the importance of developing the theory of *gram swaraj* from where we can lay the

foundation of *swaraj* in India.⁴²² Sri Aurobindo actually played the role of a national leader instead of a social activist just like Tagore and Gandhi. He never went to the grass-route level of village reconstruction model, but he advocated it as an intermediate machinery of achieving *swaraj*. But interestingly for implementing his theory regarding *swaraj* in nation we have to start its implementation from the grass-root level of villages.

⁴²² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Palli Samiti", p. 885



Sixth Chapter

*The Life Divine: way through Historical stages*⁴²³

In the context of social-political thought historical changes have several important roles to play. Sri Aurobindo's theory of Life Divine unravels such path towards human cycle through the ups and downs of history. Road towards the achievement of Life Divine by the help of human cycle is, according to Sri Aurobindo, a rough journey through the path of history and society.⁴²⁴ But for going through that path of history we are mainly dealing with external data collection instead, as told by him, of concentrating towards the mental sphere. History, in his opinion, has to collect both the internal and external kind of data to understand the proper change of human society. For this reason we can discover in his doctrine the psychological factor existing behind the historical changes.

Psychology is believed to deal with human brain functions and nervous system. How could we combine it with that of history which seems completely different path than that? History mainly deals with external data collection about the political

⁴²³ The entire discussion of this chapter explaining the relation of Sri Aurobindo's social and political views with his spiritualistic views is based mainly upon *The Human Cycle* and *The Ideal of Human Unity*.

⁴²⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Cycle of Society", p. 5

laws, rites and customs along with the economic developments of an empire throughout the historical periods; while psychology deals with emotional and mental functions of mankind living within that dynasty. How these two totally separate ideas are combined with each other in the development of Aurobindian theory regarding Life Divine is really an interesting subject to deal with.

Now in this context we can quote the opinion of Sri Aurobindo from *The Human Cycle* while discussing about the rare combination of history and psychology:

‘It is not surprising therefore that in history and sociology attention should have been concentrated on the external data, laws, institutions, rites, customs, economic factors and developments, while the deeper psychological elements so important in the activities of a mental, emotional, ideative being like man have been very much neglected.’⁴²⁵

Let me try to formulate this quotation in my own words. Sri Aurobindo in this quotation tried to say that history should not be confined in gathering external data but also in understanding the human psychology living within the historical phase. We should not underestimate the influence of historical changes over individuals. Truly Asoka’s reign was a path-breaking reign for the Indian history but we would also concentrate on the influence of his dynasty over his subjects. History cannot concentrate only over several historical phases and reigns of different dynasties; but also on its influence over the people living within its realm. History indeed needs to focus on the subjective and the objective factors regarding the progress of human

⁴²⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society” , p. 5

society. It is the uniqueness of Aurobindian doctrine of Life Divine which we have to evaluate through several historical stages.

A. Dual Approaches of History: Positivism and Anti-positivism:

From the above discussion we can have two separate approaches of history namely the positivistic approach of history and the non-positivistic approach of history. The positivists empathized over the external collection of historical data while the anti-positivists or non-positivists included the psychological aspect in the arena of history. Before indulging with their notions let me make it clear that due to the acceptance of the psychological point of view in the context of history we can consider Sri Aurobindo also as an anti-positivist.

- **Positivistic Approach of History:**

It is believed that positivism is founded by Augustus Comte (1788-1857). Comte claimed that the knowledge of the world should be gained only through observation. Positivists thought that history and society should confine their arena within the boundary of observational phenomena. According to the positivists, sociological survey should not be concerned with the internal feelings, motives as well as the emotions of the individual. Everything in the society should have objective approach towards life. Since the mental states are unobservable due to their sheer existence in the level of the person's consciousness, they cannot be measured by any objective method. Only science can give us the way to approach the knowledge by objective method. Hence a positivist wants to go through the use of scientific objective method so that we can observe the growth of history personally.

Everything in the world has to be dependent upon mere observational facts because, according to the positivists, the observational facts are bound to be true. Hence it is believed that the observational facts work as the core or basis of positivism. Positivistic historical approach claims that history has to be based upon external events that come to us by the means of observations only.

- **Non-positivistic/Anti-positivistic Approach of History:**

Anti-positivism is a contrary idea to that of the positivistic theory of history. It neither wants to focus over the observational method of science nor on the ongoing reigns of the kings or the monarchs. Anti-positivism grew in the 19th century and Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) and Heinrich Rickert (1863-1936) were known to be the founders of this theory. According to the anti-positivistic approach to history, the growth of history should concentrate on its impact over human personality. They want to incorporate psychology within the arena of history.

Anti-positivists never thought that our knowledge acquiring process can be scientific and neutral of human psychology. Positivism, according to the Anti-positivists, drew an artificial line of difference between the observer and the object. The object, whatever can be observed, has to be dependent upon the perspective of the observer. In their view, we cannot observe the growth of history so neutrally. We cannot put our personal experience apart from the sociological growth. History deals with not only the scientific observational description of the rules of the kings or monarchs or aristocrats or bureaucrats, but also its impact over common people. In this respect they introduced the term '*verstehen*' (it was first introduced by Talcott Parsons in his book *The Structure of Social Action* written in 1937) as the

social phenomenon which relates human psychology with that of the social world and they evaluated this term as the ‘first-person perspective’.

Karl Lamprecht (1856-1915) was also a well-known anti-positivist. Lamprecht never accepted the fact that history should roam around the lives of our national heroes or monarchs; instead it should be based upon broad social, cultural and psychological trends of the individual life. Sri Aurobindo was also a well declared anti-positivist as he accepted the influence of Lamprecht over his own historical analysis.⁴²⁶ Sri Aurobindo never used the growth of history from the positivistic approach. He used the term ‘history’ purposefully in the sense of anti-positivism. His main goal hidden behind was to achieve the freedom of India by making it free from the bondage of political servitude under the British dominion through the two long decades from 1757 to 1947. His notion of history is completely adjacent to this new goal. It is a well accepted fact of today’s history that whenever we go through the history of the British period in India we cannot overlook its impact over Indian citizens.

Sri Aurobindo, as an anti-positivist, never identified the general pattern of history by giving priority to external data, laws, institutions, rites, customs, economic factors and developmental thesis.⁴²⁷ The deeper psychological factors of history, according to him, are always commonly ignored by us.⁴²⁸ The hidden motive behind the French Revolution was the 18th century philosophic movement and fire-

⁴²⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 6

⁴²⁷ Ibid, p. 5

⁴²⁸ Ibid, p. 5

ejecting writings of Rousseau and Voltaire; instead of the economic necessity of the suffering nation. While discussing about the impact of French revolution Sri Aurobindo truly analyzed that at that time history laid much stress upon the historical events, periods, circumstantial atmospheres, life-styles of autocratic monarchs like Napoleon etc; but never realized the true importance of the individual life and soul and hence failed in the endeavor of appreciating the impact of common men like Danton upon it. Even though the story of French revolution was commonly believed to be centered on the rages and angers of the common men against the French dynasty; but after reaching success the commoners again had been forced to remain in the background and there started the story of concentration of power and riches in the hands of French aristocracy and bureaucracy. The lives of common men were again thought to be unappealing in the arena of history as they were used none the less but just the tools of de-throning the monarchy and establishing aristocratic and bureaucratic rule in France.

Sri Aurobindo aimed at a social as well as psychological approach towards history.⁴²⁹ Scientific history has been conceived by him as the record of political action, play of economic forces and also a developmental course of the institutional evolution.⁴³⁰ The few who still valued the psychological element, in his view, have kept their eyes fixed on certain individuals and conceive history as a biography about the individual life. That type of biography is merely the personal life-history of the monarchs or aristocrats. The lives of common people are always ignored

⁴²⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Cycle of Society", p. 6

⁴³⁰ *Ibid*, p. 6

while discussing about the development of the historical periods. However in a society we have to discover its impact over all of its residents as Sri Aurobindo truly evaluated that the ‘perfect society will be that which most entirely favours the perfection of the individual’.⁴³¹

B. Several Historical Stages: Sri Aurobindo:

In the light of Lamprecht’s thought, Sri Aurobindo made a psychological theory regarding the human cycle of society. In his opinion, our society should have several psychological cycles to be originated from. According to him, a psychological cycle remains behind the essential development of every culture or every nation. On this conceptual basis, following Lamprecht, Sri Aurobindo mentioned about several psychological stages of human society. They are as follows – the symbolic, the typical, the conventional, the individualistic and the subjective. Some critics classified them as three stages [first, symbolic, typical and conventional; second, individualistic and third, subjective stages] while some others still classified them as five different psychological stages of society. Sri Aurobindo, following Lamprecht, accepted all five stages regarding the psychological stages of society.⁴³² It is believed by him that the basis of such division in Lamprecht’s thesis could be derived from the German history where society is conceived to be based directly upon the psychological domains of life.⁴³³ Yet, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, due to the complicacy of human mind it is hard to tell its impact and

⁴³¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, “The Imperfection of Past Aggregates”, p. 15

⁴³² Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 6

⁴³³ *Ibid*, p. 6

succession over history. However he never rejected the inner value of such psychological theory.

Sri Aurobindo earnestly analyzed the impact of Lamprecht in the context of history while accepting his concept of five psychological stages, namely symbolic, typical, conventional, individualistic and subjective.⁴³⁴ Sri Aurobindo had strong faith over the inevitable evolution of humanity through three steps – infra-rational, rational and supra-rational. The first three psychological stages, namely symbolic, typical and conventional are incorporated by him into the realm of infra-rational stage of human progress. The fourth of the cycle, individualistic, will fall within the rational stage.⁴³⁵ While the final one, i.e. the subjective stage, will be incorporated within the supra-rational stage of civilization.⁴³⁶ In the first three social stages the growth of rational power is hardly to be seen. So they are known to be the infra-rational stages of society. In the individualistic stage the growth of rationalism is to be noticed with the growth of physical science. Therefore it is known to be the rational stage of human society. But the last stage i.e. the subjective stage has to go beyond rationalism and to reach to the goal of spiritualism. Hence it is known to be the supra-rational stage. These five stages are considered by him to be the psychological stages of human society. The argument is that, as an anti-positivist, Sri Aurobindo never draws a line of difference between human psychology and its effect over history. By the growth of history human mentality and his psychology

⁴³⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 6

⁴³⁵ Ibid, “The Age of Individualism and Reason”, p. 16

⁴³⁶ Ibid, “The Coming of the Subjective Stage”, p. 27

have also been affected. It is a well-established fact that history has immense effect over human lives, be it the French Revolution or the kingdom of Asoka. Perhaps this is the reason behind the calling of the human cycle as the historical as well as the psychological stages by Sri Aurobindo.⁴³⁷

- **Symbolic Stage:**

The symbolic stage, according to Sri Aurobindo, falls under the infra-rational stage of human society.⁴³⁸ At this primitive stage, as envisioned by him, men do not know how to use their rational power or the power of reasoning.⁴³⁹ At this stage of society the use of symbol is pre-dominant. Before the evolution of language symbols are used by men to communicate between each others. Symbol, at this stage, stands as the means of conveying inner feelings of human beings. Marx defined this primitive stage of society as primitive communism. In this primitive communism, according to Marx, men used symbols as the means of their communication. In the Bronze Age or Stone Age men indeed, being ignorant of the use of language, use symbols as a means of conveying feelings. This symbolic stage is known to be the basis of other stages just as the use of symbol is the starting-point of every language.

But according to Sri Aurobindo, in India this stage represents the Rig-Vedic period.⁴⁴⁰ In his assessment the invocations of the *Vedas* are symbolic in character. The *sutras* from *Brahmanas* and *Upanishads* are naturally symbolic, in his view, as

⁴³⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 6

⁴³⁸ Ibid, p.7

⁴³⁹ Ibid, p. 7

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 7

they try to teach us the necessity of the institution of sacrifice in our daily life. Sacrifice in a *yajña* stands for sacrificing one's own *aham* or *ahankāra* instead of sacrificing a proportion of materials of *yajña* to the Nature-Gods.⁴⁴¹ So the symbol of sacrifice in any *yajña* stands for the sacrifice of *ahankāra*. In the *Rig Veda* the hymns of marriage symbolize the marriage of *Suryā*, daughter of Sun, to other different Gods; rather than the marriage of human beings. The relation between men and women, according to Sri Aurobindo, as depicted in the *Samkhya* philosophy, is symbolically based upon the relation of *purusha* (*puruṣa*) and *prakriti* (*prakṛti*), (depicted in the *Vedas as gna* and *nri*), the male and female divine principles on which the creation of the entire universe is dependent.⁴⁴² In the later Vedic time *prakriti* has no spiritual existence without *purusha* but in *Tantrik* theory female part obtains the highest realm than the male. But both these theories accepted, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, that in fact *prakriti* is symbolically much respectable and worthy to be worshipped.⁴⁴³ In this way Sri Aurobindo discovered symbolic aspect written in different doctrines at the time of Rig-Vedic period.

The system of *caturvarṇa* seems symbolic in nature to Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁴⁴ According to the *Purusha Sukta* of the *Vedas*, as conceived by him, the four *varṇas* are emerged from the body of the Deity, from his head, arms, thighs and feet.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Cycle of Society", p. 7

⁴⁴² Ibid, p. 8

⁴⁴³ Ibid, p. 8

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 8

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 9

Brahmins emerge from the head of the Deity and hence their place in the society is supreme to all. *Kshatriyas* emerge from the arms of the Deity and hence they are destined to guard the society. *Vaisyas* emerge from the thighs of the Deity. *Sudras* emerge from the feet of the Deity and hence their place is lowest in social order than other classes. This theory has an inherent symbolic essence. It shows that *Brahmins* (*Brāhmins*) are the men of knowledge; *Kshatriyas* (*Kṣatriyas*) are the men of power; *Vaishyas* (*Vaiśyas*) are the men of production and supporting staff of the society; whereas *Sudras* (*Śūdras*) are the men known to be the servant class of the entire society. In this symbolic stage the entire human society, according to the *Vedas*, is symbolized as the *Divine Purusha* and its *caturvarṇas* or the four different social castes or sects as the four separate bodily organs of that *Divine Purusha* (*Puruṣa*). From this symbolism there arises the possibility of making rituals counting as most sacred and religious in nature. This is perhaps the main reason behind calling the symbolic stage as a religious one by Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁴⁶

Because of the divinity inherited within the social structure of the society, the knowledge factor of the *Brahmins*, according to Sri Aurobindo, is symbolically thought to be related with Divine knowledge; the power factor of the *Kshatriyas* with that of Divine power; the production factor of the *Vaishyas* with that of Divine production; and the service factor of the *Sudras* with that of Divine service.⁴⁴⁷ If the four parts of the society, namely *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Sudras* are created from the Divine then, in his view, their knowledge, power, production and

⁴⁴⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 11

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 10

service qualities have to be considered also as divine. In his analysis, these divisions of work lead us towards the four cosmic principle; the wisdom (of *Brahmins*) in conceiving the order and principle of things; the power (of *Kshatriyas*) in sanctioning and enforcing the order of that principle; the harmony (of *Vaishyas*) in creating every kind of arrangements necessary for that principles; and the service (of *Sudras*) in carrying out the rest regarding the principle.⁴⁴⁸ As extracted from the writings of Sri Aurobindo, the entire human cycle is concentrating only on one Divine principle of thing and all these four social sects, namely *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaisyas* and *Sudras* has to perform their own actions according to this principle with the help of knowledge, power, harmony and service.⁴⁴⁹ In this way a strong and going to be rigid social structure has been developed in this symbolic stage as conceived by him.

However, in my view, in the context of Europe, it could be assumed that, the symbolic stage had started much later than that of the India. It actually started in the medieval era of Europe. Then church stood as the ultimate symbol of power, religion, unconditional Faith and self-surrenders. *The Bible* was believed to be unauthored and the devotion shown to it had to be unquestioned. None, not even the monarch, had been granted the scope to challenge the authority of the church. Any king, who dared to deny the authority of the church, had to be dethroned by the priests as immediately as possible. Any common man if tried to do so, then he had to receive hard punishments, even the death penalty. The true example of such

⁴⁴⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 10

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid*, p. 10

persons declaring revolt against church and having the capital punishment in consequence was Socrates, Bruno etc philosophers. Socrates was forced to commit suicide as his theory challenged the authority of the church and the king because he encouraged his pupils to use scientific reasoning instead of showing blind religious faith. Bruno was brutally burnt alive for the same reason. In all of these cases, church tried to control over the masses by spreading blind faith towards religion. It never tolerated any challenge. In this stage, religion and church stood as the symbol of the ultimate authority over all. Hence it could be considered that the symbolic stage came much earlier in India than that of Medieval Europe. However it is completely my assumption.

- **Typal Stage:**

The second stage is called by Sri Aurobindo as the typal stage of the social order.⁴⁵⁰ In this typal stage the early symbols, used in the symbolic stage, take concrete shapes. The changeover from symbolic to typal is unprompted and sturdy. In the symbolic stage, according to him, the four-fold caste system or the *caturvarṇa* system is innately linked up with the omnipresent Absolute or *Virat Purusha* (*Virāt Puruṣa*) as his four different bodily organs.⁴⁵¹ *Caturvarṇa* system here functions as that undisruptive and creative mechanism of the society that will help it to be well-composed. But in this typal stage the caste system are growing to be rigid in nature. At this typal stage, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, *Brahmins* are typically thought to be the symbol of purity and spirituality; the *Kshatriyas* are typically thought to be

⁴⁵⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 11

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid*, p. 9

the symbol of courage, chivalry, bravery; the *Vaishyas* are thought to be the symbol of economic transactions, production; whereas the *Sudras* are typically thought to be the symbol of working class, labors, serfs, *proletariats*.⁴⁵² There remains very small scope of changeover in these four social sects due to rigidity.

But what is the need of such rigidity in typical stage? Let me try to analyze it. The principal contribution of this stage over the society, according to Sri Aurobindo, is that it added the idea of social honor with the four social orders or *caturvarṇa*.⁴⁵³ The honor of the *Brahmins* resides in purity, piety, high spiritual bent of mind and unique persuasion of knowledge. The honor of the *Kshatriyas* resides in courage, chivalry, strength and self-mastery as well as in noble bent of character. The honor of the *Vaishyas* resides in the production ability, economic transactions and their merchant-like bent of mind. While the honor of the *Sudras* exists in faithful self-surrender, obedience and non-stop service ability. But these social orders are not, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, so much rigid so that they could not be broken at all. In this stage of society the interchange between the four social sects are completely allowed.⁴⁵⁴ Hence a *Brahmin* child can easily opt for becoming *Kshatriya* according to his own choice, e.g. Drona of *Mahabharata*. A *Kshatriya* can also opt to be *Brahmin*. For example, Biswamitra who even being a *Kshatriya* warrior king accepted Brahmanism as per his own wish. A *Kshatriya* can also select to be *Vaishya* or *Sudra* as well; e.g. Adhirath, the foster-father of Karna, of *Mahabharata*

⁴⁵² Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 11

⁴⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 11

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 11

who opted to be *Sudra* after marrying a *Sudra* woman. Even a *Sudra* boy, at this stage, can be given the opportunity to opt for any superior stage as per his wish. Jabal Satyakam was *Sudra* by birth who chose to be *Brahmin*.

Whereas we could say that in Europe, unlike India, the society was type-casted into two different social sects. The aristocrats and bureaucrats remain in the first class, while the serfs or commoners called as *proletariats* by Karl Marx, remained in the other group. The aristocrats were due to their excessive power and wealth, were included into the superior group like the monarchs. But the common men, for their servitude and poverty, were in the lower group. The entire European society was divided into these two groups. This group division was quite similar with the *caturvarṇa* system of ancient Indian society; even though the European society was never divided into four groups like that of India.

At that typical stage, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, the four social stages exist merely as social customs or traditions and like other customs they can also be reformed or changed with time.⁴⁵⁵ But in the next stage, as conceived by him, they become gradually rigid enough as social conventions so that interchanges between the sects turn out to be totally banned.⁴⁵⁶ When the social customs, related with *caturvarṇa* system in India, of the typical stage begin to gain rigidity then the coming of the next stage i.e. the conventional stage seems mandatory.

⁴⁵⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 11

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 11

- **Conventional Stage:**

The typical stage naturally passes into the next stage i.e. the conventional stage as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁵⁷ The reason behind such explanation is the on-going social stigma and ever-pressing rigidity of social customs. At this social stage, in his view, the social customs become rigid as conventions which cannot be broken.⁴⁵⁸ In the typical stage, the four social orders have been type-casted; so the sons of *Brahmins*, *Kshatriyas*, *Vaishyas* and *Sudras* have to maintain these social orders. However they are allowed to break this type system as per their wish. Then the caste system is not so much rigid in nature as it completely allows an individual to follow his own instinct. But from the starting of the third stage i.e. the conventional stage, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, the basis of Indian caste system become completely rigid, so that nobody belonging to any social sect can even dare to break the on-going social conventions.⁴⁵⁹

Actually the reason behind such rigidity, in my view, is also logical. Suppose most persons belonging to the *Brahmin* sect change into *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* or *Sudra* sects; then there will be limited number of *Brahmins* left in our society to inherit the profound knowledge regarding Indian art and culture and also about ancient Indian scriptures, like the *Vedas* and *Puranas*. If the *Kshatriyas* change into *Brahmins* or others then our society will left protection less as the *Kshatriyas* are believed to be the protector class of society. If the *Vaishyas* change into others then our society

⁴⁵⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Cycle of Society", p. 11

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid, p. 11

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 12

will grow poorer as they are the merchant class of society. If the *Sudras* change into others then there will be no servants left in society. If any of these castes decay then the society has to die its unnatural death. For making the society strong enough so that it can sustain through the decades and can retain its purity, the caste system in the conventional stage is made such strong that interchanges between the castes become almost next to impossible. In this way we can justify the enactment of extreme rigidity of the conventional stage over the society and its people.

According to Sri Aurobindo the conventional stage is the last phase of the infra-rational stage as it is the previous stage of rationalism. It is also believed to be the longest phase of human society. This stage of human society, being fixed in form, is supposed by him to bring supports towards the execution of religion and culture.⁴⁶⁰ It means that in conventionalism, being exceptionally rigid in nature, the four-fold social sects or *caturvarṇa* system manifests itself by the help of executing religious rituals and cultural symbolisms. Then the performance of *dharma*⁴⁶¹ seems mandatory in nature. A *Brahmin* boy is bound to perform his duties concerning knowledge and spirituality as his birth-right. The *Kshatriya*, *Vaishya* or *Sudra* boy even though competent than the *Brahmin*, cannot replace him. A *Kshatriya* has to perform warfare and chivalry as his most sacred duties; a *Vaishya* has to perform his monetary transaction related acts as the most sacred duty; and a *Sudra* has to

⁴⁶⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 13

⁴⁶¹ The word ‘*dharma*’ comes from the root ‘*dhṛ*’ which stands for ‘*dhāraṇ*’ or bearing. From *Santiparva* of the *Mahabharata* ||12/1-9|| it is clearly stated that *dharma* is ‘*dhārnadharmā*’ or which bears a man. In *Mimamsa* philosophy the definition of *dharma* is – ‘*chodanālakṣaṇo arthoḥ dharmoḥ*’ i.e. if we can describe to someone ‘what is right’ and ‘what is wrong’ then this imperatives or indicative sentences are known to be ‘*chodanā*’ and whatever is defined by this ‘*chodanā*’ is *dharma*. However the term ‘*dharma*’ is mainly used in the first sense.

perform as a labor and to continue it as his most sacred duty. The performance of one's own *dharma* in the sense of most sacred duty is considered by Sri Aurobindo as 'fanciful religious sign and ritual'.⁴⁶² Here the famous concept of the *Gita*'s *svadharma*, as depicted by Sri Krishna to Arjuna, comes into existence. Everyone, belonging to the four social sects or *caturvarṇa*, has to follow his own *svadharma* and shall not even dare to follow the *svadharma* of others. Hence a *Brahmin* has to follow his own *svadharma*. The same will be true in the case of the *Kshatriyas* (*Kṣatriyas*), *Vaishyas* (*Vaiśyas*) as well as of the *Sudras* (*Śūdras*). However this conventionalism is considered by Sri Aurobindo as the end stage of the Indian caste system with the ultimate breakdown of economic structure of India thereafter.⁴⁶³

Now let us try to explore the idea of *svadharma*. According to the 35 verse of 3rd chapter of the *Gita* Sri Krishna said:

śreyān svadharmo viguṇaḥ paradharmāt svanuṣṭhitāt.

svadharme nidhanaṁ śreyaḥ paradharmo bhayāvahaḥ ||3/35||

[Following one's own nature or *dharma*, though imperfect, is still better than following other's nature or *dharma* even though seems perfect. Even dying in one's *svadharma* is far better as following others' *dharma* will naturally leads towards destruction and decay. Here *dharma* stands for *svadharma*.]

⁴⁶² Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Cycle of Society", p. 12

⁴⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 12

In the context of *svadharma* Sri Aurobindo also had his own explanation to share with us.⁴⁶⁴ *Svadharma*, the word, is made up of two words ‘*sva*’ i.e. own and ‘*dharma*’. The word ‘*dharma*’ can stand for quality, character trait, nature etc. To Sri Aurobindo ‘*dharma*’ in *svadharma* stands for nature i.e. ‘a law of life’.⁴⁶⁵ Hence *svadharma* stands to him as following one’s own nature or law of life as commanded by Sri Krishna to Arjuna. However the concept of *svadharma*, according to Sri Aurobindo, is dependent upon four types of *swabhava* or four fundamental character traits.⁴⁶⁶ Every man, in his view, has his unique character trait or *swabhava* (*svabhāva*) and his *svadharma* has to follow his *swabhava*.⁴⁶⁷ To make it clear, we all know that there is four-fold caste system in society, *Brahmin* (*Brāhmin*), *Kshatriya* (*Kṣatriya*), *Vaishya* (*Vaiśya*) and *Sudra* (*Śūdra*); and all of these social sects have four different types of *swabhavas* or fundamental character traits.

śamo damastapaḥ śaucam kṣāntirārjavameva ca

jñānam vijñānamāstikayam brahmakarma svabhāvajam ||18/42||

śaurayam tejo dhṛtirdākṣyam yudhhe cāpyapalāyanam

dānamīśvarabhāvaśca kṣātram karma svabhāvajam ||18/43||

kṛṣigaurakṣyavāñijyam vaiśyakarma svabhāvajam

paricaryātmakam karma śūdrasyāpi svabhāvajam ||18/44||

⁴⁶⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobinder Gita*, 5th Part, “Swabhava and svadharma”, p. 148-174

⁴⁶⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, “Karmayoga”, p. 8

⁴⁶⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Essays on the Gita*, “Swabhava and Swadharma”, p. 509

⁴⁶⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobinder Gita*, 5th Part, “Swabhava and Svadharma”, p. 152

These three verses, i.e. 42, 43 and 44 verses, of the 18th chapter of the *Gita* clearly stated that – serenity, self-control (*damas*), purity (*śaucam*), austerity, uprightness, knowledge (*jñānam*), scientific discoveries (*vijñānam*), indulgence into meditation to realize the existence of the Supreme spirit and performance of spiritual actions related to him (*brahmakarma*) etc are *swabhavas* of the *Brahmin* sects. Benevolence (*dāna*), chivalry (*śaurayam*), sticking in the battlefield, tolerance (*dhṛti*), etc are known to be the *swabhavas* of the *Kshatriya* sects. Agriculture (*kṛṣi*), monetary transaction related works, trade (*vāṇijyam*), cattle-rearing etc are the *swabhavas* or fundamental character traits of the *Vaishya* sects. All kinds of service related works (*paricaryām*) are fundamental character traits of the *Sudra* sects. All of these four castes have to follow these special character traits or *swabhavas* as their *svadharmas*. And if someone wants to overlap his *svadharmas* then the entire social structure will meet decay.

The end of conventionalism, according to Sri Aurobindo, seems mandatory for making the basis of Indian social system fixed in nature with the help of the external factors like the notion of birth and economic status.⁴⁶⁸ First, in the conventional stage, nobody is allowed to leave his sect in which he takes birth and he has to stick into it till the end of his life. Conventionalism accepts birth as the ultimate criteria of the caste system. A *Brahmin* boy has to be *Brahmin* for securing the purity of his sect and is never allowed to leave it according to his wish even though he is not compatible enough. The same is true about the other sects; be it

⁴⁶⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 12

Kshatriyas, Vaishyas or Sudras. The *Kshatriya, Vaishya or Sudra* boy is also bound to follow his sect in which he takes birth. None dare to follow his own will except the duties nested by his sect according to his birth. Secondly, in conventional stage we can notice the concept of economic growth related with it. Priests and *pandits* under the head of *Brahmins*; aristocrats, bureaucrats, barons under the head of *Kshatriyas*; merchants, money-lenders, traders under the head of *Vaishyas*; and half-fed and economically dependent serfs under the head of *Sudras* lay foundation to the social structure. At that social stage, economic status rules the society on such a strong basis that the bureaucrats and aristocrats i.e. the *Kshatriyas* along with the merchants and traders i.e. the *Vaishyas* are growing richer by concentrating all the wealth in their hands. The poor serfs i.e. the *Sudras* are growing poorer due to this concentration of wealth. However the church, priests, *pandits* are capable enough to maintain their sustenance by evoking the fear of God in common mind and hence they also have enough money concentrated in their hands. Hence, according to Sri Aurobindo, the wealth concentrated in the hands of the upper class give them more social respect than the *Sudras* and these upper social classes, namely *Brahmins, Kshatriyas* and *Vaishyas* are not in the mood to give the *Sudras* enough opportunity to uplift their social structure.⁴⁶⁹ The main reason behind it is the concentration of wealth but it is strongly disguised under the name of maintaining the social purity at this conventional stage. Thus, in Sri Aurobindo's analysis, with the evolution of the caste system the outward supports, e.g. birth, economic functions, religious rituals, sacrament of family and performance of customs, begin to inflate extremely in the

⁴⁶⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Cycle of Society", p. 12

schema of conventionalism.⁴⁷⁰ Because of the social rigidity inflicted in this social stage, via the external factors, it becomes stagnant and this stagnancy brings the end of this age as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁷¹

In Europe, at this stage, the society could be conventionally divided into the two rigid social classes: the aristocrats and bureaucrats in the superior group, while the serfs and proletariats in the lower group. In the previous stage, these two social classes can inter-change their positions. But in this stage, the two social classes were become rigid and the two group members could not receive the chance to interchange their social positions. None could then even dare to break the social stigma. These social divisions, at that time, became conventions. Hence it was truly known to be the conventional stage in the European society. Surprisingly Sri Aurobindo while describing the nature of conventionalism, with the help of economic status, drew profound similarity with that of India and Europe.⁴⁷²

But can we consider the conventional stage as the golden stage of society due to its purity and rigidity in nature? In its answer, following Sri Aurobindo, we can mention that this stage is far from being considered as golden age of society.⁴⁷³ Yes it is true that in this stage the clan-wise purity is maintained as the topmost priority. But due to the rigidity and social stigmas spread around the social conventions at this stage it cannot be considered by him as the golden age of society. In the golden

⁴⁷⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 12

⁴⁷¹ Ibid, p. 12

⁴⁷² Ibid, p. 13

⁴⁷³ Ibid, p. 13

age of society, according to Sri Aurobindo, the search for truth should be predominant.⁴⁷⁴ The golden age is the age of intellectual revolt which involves the use of personal power of reasoning, intelligence and freedom to reach the ultimate truth. This road towards golden age of human cycle, in his view, starts from individualism and ends in spiritualism or subjectivism.⁴⁷⁵

- **Individualistic Stage:**

This stage is incorporated by Sri Aurobindo within the range of rational psychological phase.⁴⁷⁶ The reason behind it is that in this social stage men first try to use their individual reasoning power of mind. In his observation, the coming of the individualistic stage becomes mandatory in the form of a ‘revolt of reason’ due to the failure of both conventional and typical stages of society.⁴⁷⁷

This individualistic stage, in the context of Europe, was conceived by Sri Aurobindo as ‘the Age of Revolt’ and ‘the Age of Reason’ because it threw challenge against dogmatism and consequently against the authoritarianism of the church.⁴⁷⁸ With the outbreak of individualistic agenda the use of reasoning power made men aware of their religious freedom in the West. According to him, the West from the starting witnessed material progress; but it failed to identify the truth lying

⁴⁷⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Cycle of Society”, p. 13

⁴⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 14

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid, “The Age of Individualism and Reason”, p. 16

⁴⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 16

⁴⁷⁸ Ibid, p. 14 & 16

within the soul as India did per excellence.⁴⁷⁹ Hence here religion was certainly devoid of spiritual touch unlike India. The immediate result, according to him, was the achievement of materialistic growth of the Western society and the hidden possibilities of it had been transformed into mechanism, antagonism and gradually towards mass destruction.⁴⁸⁰ This crisis of the West helped it to bring forth towards the individualistic stage.

The individualistic stage of Europe however, according to Sri Aurobindo, raised a valid question against the divine command theory well known in the previous stage.⁴⁸¹ The church held its supremacy, in the conventional stage of society, on the basis of this divine command theory where it was proclaimed that the morally good acts would be commanded by God. The church strictly followed the moral dictum named the divine command theory as if it is God's own command. None could raise his or her voice against the church unless he or she would be punished severely. But in the next stage named the individualistic stage, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, with the help of the advancement of physical science individuals were allowed to think freely.⁴⁸² Individuals at this stage tried to revolt against the authoritative hold of the church and hence the divine command theory had been refuted by an argument named as *Euthyphro dilemma* (named following Plato's book *Euthyphro*). This dilemma begins with a question – does God will for only

⁴⁷⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Swaraj and the Coming Anarchy", p. 731

⁴⁸⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 18-19

⁴⁸¹ Ibid, p. 16-17

⁴⁸² Ibid, p. 16

morally good acts just because they are morally good or they have to be morally good just because they are willed by God? If we accept the first possibility then we have to face the problem of independence, i.e. if God wills only for morally good acts just because they are themselves morally good then the acts of moral goodness must be independent of God's will power. The question of God's will is irrelevant regarding these actions being morally good. Again if we accept the second possibility then there will raise the problem of abhorrent commands. It will say that morally good acts have to be morally good for they are willed by God. That means whatever God commands has to be good. If God commands for violence or cruelty then we also have to admit it as morally good act. In this way the divine command theory could be rejected. Sri Aurobindo used his own reasoning for refuting this divine command theory and asked some other valid questions.⁴⁸³ When did God command them? How did he command? Which medium he used for conveying his command? Even if we accept that God chose the Pope as his messenger but how would we be so sure that he would convey the same message as commanded by God? In this way, according to him, after the coming of the individualistic stage of society, with the help of our reasoning power we could reject the supremacy of the church's authority spread with the help of this divine command theory.⁴⁸⁴

In this individualistic stage the urge for discovering the truth is also prevalent in nature. In Europe, according to Sri Aurobindo, individualistic stage of mankind must discover the general standard of truth to which the individual judgment will be

⁴⁸³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 17

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 16-17

inwardly compelled to subscribe without any irrational external imposition from the highest authority, be it church or anything else.⁴⁸⁵ As discovered by him, individualism must reach some principle of social order, with the help of physical science, which shall be rooted equally on a universal truth about things; an order is needed to put a boundary around any kind of emotional urge stood opposite to the development of the moral and intellectual thoughts.⁴⁸⁶ Let me explain it. With the growth of physical science, at this stage, men start to question about almost everything. Physical science helps to develop the speculative and scientific reasoning capability in the man. Then the controlling power of the church and religion seems intolerable to him. Hence he starts questioning. His reasoning ability helps him a lot to comprehend the true situation. As conceived by Sri Aurobindo, Europe has set an example in the speculative and scientific use of reasoning capabilities of the individual. However for this over-dependence on the orderliness gained by the science, in his prediction, the end of individualism is not far away in Europe.⁴⁸⁷

According to Sri Aurobindo, in Europe the age of individualism has taken birth and exercised in its full swing; whereas the East has been only influenced by the West. Individualism comes to the East following the West as Individualism is not thought to be by him the original impulse of India.⁴⁸⁸ The individualistic stage in Europe

⁴⁸⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 20

⁴⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 20

⁴⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 21

⁴⁸⁸ Ibid, p. 15

came into existence by the coming of the renaissance period. That period was mixed up of two ancient cultures within; the Greece and the Roman cultures conjointly known to be Greco-Roman culture to Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁸⁹ Ancient Greek spirit of reasoning power and analysis of thoughts along with the Roman judicial proficiency and sense of harmony relating daily life-matters remained as the salient features of the renaissance period in Europe. However, in his assumption, the East has to be awakened from its struggle between the imported sense of Western individualism and the old conventional principle of Indian society. The impact of individualism in the East should be, in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, the birth of something quite different from Western individualism. But, in his prediction, the individualistic period in the East will never sustain for long. The influence of this individualistic stage over the East, in his view, is likely to be directed towards subjectivism and practical spirituality. The East had natural mastery from decades over this practical spirituality which would be restored via the subjective stage. In India individualism should be considered as the mere gateway of subjectivism by him as this stage will be helpful, via discovering an individual's true identity, for evoking the collective fellow-feeling in him as the road towards the next stage.⁴⁹⁰

The disadvantage of individualism preached by the West as conceived by Sri Aurobindo is that it never uses individualism as an intermediate stage of subjectivism like that of the East. Even though East is influenced by the West but it grows rapidly than the West as in East, according to Sri Aurobindo, at

⁴⁸⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 19

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 24

individualistic age the search for Supreme by realizing one's own true identity is inherent.⁴⁹¹ The East will be able to realize that the individual is something in himself, a soul or a being, who has to fulfill his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or his assigned part in the truth and law of the 'collective existence'; so he demands freedom, space and initiative for his soul.⁴⁹² This inner search for soul starting in this individualistic stage will allow the individuals of the East to go towards the next important stage namely the subjective stage while the West till today, in his prediction, remains limited within the materialistic arena of individualism.

- **Subjective Stage:**

Subjective stage, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the necessary outcome of the individualistic stage.⁴⁹³ This subjective stage is the one and only supra-rational stage of society discovering 'the substantial truths of life' as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.⁴⁹⁴ Why this social stage is known to be supra-rational? Because in this stage our reasoning power has struck within a limited boundary and our inward search for the union between soul (*ātman*) and Divine (*Brahman*) begins. The word 'supra' stands for 'beyond' and hence 'supra-rational' means that stage which is beyond the grasp of rationalism or that stage which starts where rationalism ends.

⁴⁹¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 24

⁴⁹² Ibid, p. 24

⁴⁹³ Ibid, "The Coming of the Subjective Age", p. 26

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 26

As we find out from the writings of Sri Aurobindo individualistic stage concentrates on the growth of the reasoning power among individuals.⁴⁹⁵ Here individuals remain at the centre of attention. Who am I? Why am I like this? These tricky questions have to be aroused in the individual mind at that social stage. But here some amount of stagnancy of thought also occurs as our thought level should remain only surrounding us. It does not interfere with the thought level of the others. As conceived by Sri Aurobindo, in this social stage the entire society seems to concentrate only over the individual, be it the relation with its existence or factors related to its own growth. 'I' will be the only subject matter of discussion in a society at that stage.

But from here arises a very horrifying fact relating to the social growth in the individualistic stage. If we concentrate only on individuals then we will never give any space to others. Individual ego in the sense of *aham* or *ahaṅkāra* gives birth to the feeling 'I am the best'. And when an entire race or clan becomes victim of this supreme feeling, guided by each person's individual ego, e.g. what happened in the case of Nazi Germany, then the collective demonstration of their individual ego is known to be the collective ego; e.g. the feeling that 'my race is the best'. The existence of individual ego and collective ego, in the sense of *vyāṣṭi* (*vyāṣṭi*) and *samaṣṭi*,⁴⁹⁶ leads us dangerously towards, according to Sri Aurobindo, the uprise of the Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and Communist Russia. Germans due to this misconception killed many innocent *Yehudis* in Gas Chamber. The reason behind

⁴⁹⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Coming of the Subjective Age", p. 27

⁴⁹⁶ Ibid, "True and False Subjectivism", p. 48

such behavior of Nazi Germany was hidden in their age-long faith in being their true *Aryan* race by birth and this would lead them in trying to make the world free from the grasp of the non-*Aryans*. From this prominent example we can see that why individualistic stage, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, seems so unwelcomed to the society and what makes the coming of subjectivism so mandatory to him. This can be considered as the first necessity for advocating subjectivism by him.

With the coming of the individualistic stage the triumph of physical science has to be welcomed by us whole heartedly and it would help us to fight against all religious and social stigmas. However the arena of physical science is too narrow in nature. It has to look just on the physical side of a being. With the advancement of physical science in the individualistic stage we can try to look into the true nature of the physical being. But this discovery, according to Sri Aurobindo, does not seem at all satisfactory as men often try to look deep beyond the limits of their physical being.⁴⁹⁷ For satisfying the psychological demand of the mind and soul of an individual the necessity of the subjective stage has to be felt very badly. This is the second necessity of subjectivism.

Another necessity of subjectivism is that individualistic stage has met a serious problem as it concentrates, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, only over the individual too much.⁴⁹⁸ But man has natural tendency to go towards the universal. It means that an individual is, just like a part of his own society, a part of the whole universe.

⁴⁹⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Coming of the Subjective Stage", p. 28-29

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 27

He has to live not only for his own sake, but also for the sake of the society and also for the sake of the entire universe. Society and universe, according to Sri Aurobindo, both are made up of individuals and hence every individual has a mandatory part to play in both society and universe.⁴⁹⁹ Men are social as well as universal beings and they cannot live separately out of the society or universe. Individualism, in his opinion, certainly encourages the feeling of individuality among men but for the sake of the existence of the society and universe men must also develop the universal feelings and it can take birth only with the coming of the subjective stage of the society.⁵⁰⁰

The subjective stage is conceived as the gateway of Life Divine by Sri Aurobindo. Hence it will be possible to discover the spiritual overtone hidden behind this stage. The trial for spiritual advancement, according to him, of all individuals belonging to the entire society all inclusively, leads them towards the notion of collective salvation or Life Divine.⁵⁰¹ The reason behind is that, if we try to advance the spiritual condition of one individual then others existing in the same society cannot stay apart. An individual, in Sri Aurobindo's explanation, being a part of society has to achieve his spiritual goal not only for himself but also for the sake of others belonging to the same social structure. That is the reason why subjectivism is

⁴⁹⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Coming of the Subjective Stage", p. 28

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid, p. 28

⁵⁰¹ Ibid, "The Objective and Subjective Views of Life", p. 62

considered as the gateway of Sri Aurobindo's long-cherished dream regarding Life Divine.⁵⁰²

However, in my opinion, it is really very unfortunate to find out that the value of the subjective stage is yet to be discovered by us. Men concentrate so much upon the attainment of the materialistic and rationalistic satisfaction that they forget to achieve the spiritual glory. Man deals mainly with the problem of his vital ego (ego determined by his vital urges, e.g. the urge for living) or a physical ego (ego determined by his physical urges, e.g. taking food, sleeping) which are considered to be by Sri Aurobindo the sign of his advancement towards individualism.⁵⁰³ But the vast arena of the individual's mental ego or the existence of the *ātman* or spirit remains untouched even today. We are unable to understand the true nature of subjectivism as the true relationship between *ātman* and *Brahman* is yet to be discovered. However, in Sri Aurobindo's prediction, after subjective stage man can go towards identifying his own luminous self or secret Godhead which is actually the road of Life Divine. But in reality the attainment of it is also doubtful.

C. Is Individualistic Stage worthy of welcome?

In the consideration of Sri Aurobindo the individualistic stage is worthy to be welcomed for these two following reasons:⁵⁰⁴

⁵⁰² Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Objective and Subjective Views of Life", p. 62

⁵⁰³ Ibid, "The Coming of the Subjective Stage", p. 28

⁵⁰⁴ Ibid, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 15-25

The first reason is that, according to Sri Aurobindo, the coming of the individualistic age is completely mandatory for the society has suffered enough due to the existence of the conventional stage.⁵⁰⁵ If we look from the European perspective, the wealth and power were concentrated in the hands of the aristocrats or bureaucrats and the pain and suffering of the serfs or proletariats became much more prominent. The wealth was so concentrated in the hands of the aristocrats that they did not even dare to think about the upliftment of the poor people. The bureaucratic reluctance to enrich the conditions of the backward class of their society became the main cause of rapid growing of mutual distrust, anger, hatred in the minds of the serfs. In this conventional stage, the social class-structure became such strict in nature that the interchange between these two classes became utterly impossible. Due to the huge gap of the distribution of wealth and power between these two social classes, the end of the conventional stage became extremely mandatory. According to Karl Marx, this social inequality has to be ended soon by the means of class struggle.⁵⁰⁶ In my opinion, the condition of India is not better in the conventional stage as the *Sudras* are devoid of any freedom here. All powers are concentrated in the hands of *Brahmins* (as the uppermost and sacred caste of the society), *Kshatriyas* (as the guardian of the society) and *Vaishyas* (as the riches concentrated in their hands in the society). Hence individualism is worthy to be

⁵⁰⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 15

⁵⁰⁶ Marx, Karl, and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, p. 17

welcomed to Sri Aurobindo so that we can bring the ultimate change in the ongoing stage of society or the ‘solid bed-rock’ of conventionalism.⁵⁰⁷

The second reason is that, according to Sri Aurobindo, the growth of individualism is utterly desirable for the discovery of individual free-thought.⁵⁰⁸ In the three previous social stages of Europe, namely symbolic, typical and conventional, the use of religion seems mandatory in every field of life. Individual free thoughts are necessary to put an end of the religious dogmas spread by the Church. If we could look back, then we would discover that in the context of Europe the authority of church was supreme. Church, in the conventional stage, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, never encouraged the use of physical science, instead of the blind faith and superstitious beliefs; so that its disciples never even dared to challenge or ask any question regarding its sovereignty.⁵⁰⁹ The encouragement towards the use of physical science, as conceived by him, could throw the light of renaissance in the blindly faithful minds of common people, and so church never wanted to do it at all.⁵¹⁰ Blind faith and self-surrender towards the authority of the church would influence men’s minds to develop the religious tendencies, growth of fear etc; while the slightest practice of scientific knowledge could make men free from their grasp. Briefly speaking, Sri Aurobindo truly analyzed that the orthodox nature of the

⁵⁰⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Age of Individualism and Reason”, p. 15

⁵⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 21

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid, p. 18 & 20

⁵¹⁰ Ibid, p. 18

church and the gradual development of physical science in the Renaissance period at Europe helped men to go to the path of individualism.⁵¹¹

D. Drawbacks of Individualism:

Individualism has several drawbacks, in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, to be conquered by the next stage i.e. subjectivism.⁵¹²

First, in his view, the individualistic stage of human society gives birth to the attitude of supremacy in Germany and Italy.⁵¹³ Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany both, according to Sri Aurobindo, due to their blind faith over this attitude of being supreme than others, try to neglect even other nations' existence.⁵¹⁴ The main reason behind German aggression is, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, is such attitude of supremacy. German self-consciousness gives birth to this supremacy. This supreme attitude is the reason of the immediate downfall of Germany and Italy. This can be known as the exaggerated form of individualism by Sri Aurobindo as it aims at the satisfaction of the vitalistic egoism i.e. 'the egoism of individuals' in the case of Germany and Italy.⁵¹⁵

Secondly, the foremost drawback of this individualistic stage, as emphasized by Sri Aurobindo, is that it leads simultaneously towards the exaggerated form of individualism or vitalistic egoism, because in this individualistic stage men give so

⁵¹¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 18-19

⁵¹² Ibid, "The Discovery of the Nation-Soul", p. 40-43

⁵¹³ Ibid, p. 40

⁵¹⁴ Ibid, p. 40

⁵¹⁵ Ibid, "The Objective and Subjective Views of Life", p. 56

much emphasis over the individuality.⁵¹⁶ When individual ego becomes higher than everything in the world, then the vitalistic form of egoism has to be generated naturally. But the most abusive form of this individualistic stage is that it leads us towards, according to Sri Aurobindo, the dominant form of Anarchism focused by Nietzsche.⁵¹⁷ Anarchism, in its radical form, gives emphasis over the massive destruction of the existence of all including the state. Nietzsche, in my view, whether can be called as an anarchist or not is a genuine problem of philosophy. While following the view of Sri Aurobindo we can discover that even according to him Nietzsche's thesis is different from that of idealistic anarchism.⁵¹⁸ Living that controversy apart the truth is that if we nest tremendous power in the hands of an individual then he will consider him as the supreme of all and can concentrate towards unwanted massive killing. Hence over emphasis on individuality can lead us towards anarchism as rightly conceived by Sri Aurobindo.

However according to Sri Aurobindo, with the beginning of individualism, the end of conventionalism is a necessity; for in the conventional stage the use of individual reasoning power never been utilized to its ultimate limit.⁵¹⁹ In the typical stage the tyranny of the religion have overwhelming effect all over the world, be it India or West at this stage. The bankruptcy of the mental power and reasoning ability will gradually lead towards the ultimate destruction of the human race. If we become

⁵¹⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Objective and Subjective Views of Life", p. 56

⁵¹⁷ Ibid, p. 56

⁵¹⁸ Ibid, p. 56

⁵¹⁹ Ibid, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 15

over-dependent upon the religion, then we should act as the puppet in the hands of it. But being highly intelligent species among all others, human race has to practice control over his mental faculties and reasoning abilities. For this we need to advance towards the stage of individualism. However because of our over-dependency over mental and reasoning faculty at this stage its end is also determined via the coming of the next stage. This stage is named by Sri Aurobindo as subjectivism and it is also known to be the preparatory stage of his long-cherished dream of the Life Divine.⁵²⁰

E. Dangers of Subjectivism: True and False Subjectivism:

If we go through the doctrine of Sri Aurobindo then we can discover that the subjective stage seems to be the most wanted stage among the other social stages of society. However subjectivism can also pose some serious threat over the society, in Sri Aurobindo's view, and from here raises the question regarding true and false subjectivism.⁵²¹

Let us start our discussion first with the examples of false subjectivism of Germany, Italy and Russia; from which, following Sri Aurobindo, we will go towards the road of true subjectivism. According to him, fascist Italy, Nazi Germany and communist Russia also tried hard to identify their subjective goals and in this endeavor, falsely presupposed their supremacy over other nations based on 'egoistic self-vision'.⁵²²

⁵²⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Objective and Subjective Views of Life", p. 62

⁵²¹ Ibid, "True and False Subjectivism", p. 44-54

⁵²² Ibid, p. 49

Gas-chamber incidents over the *Yehudis* by Nazi Germany, according to Sri Aurobindo, were the outcome of the wrong impression of this ego-centrism.⁵²³ Let me explain it. Germans have false self-knowledge that they are superior races than others and they consider it their most sacred duty to make world free from the non-*Aryan* races. The reason hidden behind this nasty incident is lying in the false implication of self-knowledge by the Germans. The use of self-knowledge is the basic agenda of the subjective stage of human society and hence this German nationalism should be entertained, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, not in the sense of exaggerated form of individualism rather in the sense of false subjectivism.

But why Sri Aurobindo transformed his theory of exaggerated individualism to false subjectivism in the context of German nationalism? He clearly used the term ‘subjective German nationality’ in this regard.⁵²⁴ In his view, Germans use self-knowledge to understand the reason behind their existence. Self-knowledge is actually the symbol of subjectivism. But the biggest mistake of the German egoism is that, according to him, it uses its communal sense of individual egoism instead of discovering the true sense of communal egoism with inherent touch of universality.⁵²⁵ It misinterprets the meaning of subjectivism and hence applies the individualistic position to comprehend the inner meaning of ‘communal subjective existence’.⁵²⁶ It fails miserably to understand that self is not at all equal to ego,

⁵²³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “True and False Subjectivism”, p. 49

⁵²⁴ *Ibid*, p. 45

⁵²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 54

⁵²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 54

rather something deeper than that as interpreted by Sri Aurobindo. Hence German nationalism, in his opinion, which can stand as the exaggerated form of individualism actually stands as an example of false subjectivism.

Let us start from here the road towards true subjectivism. All the other previous social stages of subjectivism have imposed self-limitation over themselves, which has been considered as a symbol of self-ignorance by Sri Aurobindo; and thus can be easily falsified by the next stage.⁵²⁷ But due to the existence of self-knowledge, the subjective stage cannot be so easily falsified and it even does not have any self-limitation to overrule. The reason behind this is its inseparable connection with the divine element of human life that is popularly known as Life Divine.⁵²⁸ Subjective stage is the end of all these previous stages and hence the ruling of self-ignorance, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, can be ended with the self-knowledge, self-consciousness and self-realization existing in that stage.⁵²⁹

But what about the subjective stage of human society if it also possess self-ignorance in the disguise of self-knowledge? How can we end it if it also has imposed self-ignorance upon us? It has no other stage to supersede and, so, to be limited by any other superior stage else than that is just a utopia.

The danger, therefore, lies in its usage. This subjective stage, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, helps a human being to live either as an individual or a social being; but

⁵²⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "True and False Subjectivism", p. 44

⁵²⁸ Ibid, p. 49-50

⁵²⁹ Ibid, p. 29 & 44

the choice must be his own.⁵³⁰ However the social feeling is must in this stage as per my observation goes. In the observation of Sri Aurobindo, an individual when understands the value of his own life and tries to use poetic reflection, reasoning and imagination according to his own potentialities, then this stage of human life can sufficiently be known as the individualistic stage of life-structure. According to him, in this individualistic stage of history individual starts to use his own power of reasoning and rational thinking by whose help man identifies his own individual existence as a separate human being unlike others of the same human race.⁵³¹ Here the communal feeling is not yet developed in his mind. But, as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo, for the sustenance of the national existence this individualistic feeling is not at all welcomed instead of the communal feeling. Generally in the subjective stage of human society, we discover the community, the nation and any other fixed group of human race as the living organisms with a subjective being (individual) of their own. It means that in a subjective stage the individual exists as the basis of the community, nation or groups. However the problem starts with the group divisions and group-mentalities. In totalitarian states, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, the communal life is mostly important, rather than that of individual life.⁵³² German fascism, as a prominent example of extreme nationalism, also make the same blunder where the communal life is taken to be granted as superior than the

⁵³⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "True and False Subjectivism", p. 48

⁵³¹ Ibid, "The Age of Individualism and Reason", p. 15

⁵³² Ibid, p. 24

individual life. Therefore the German form of nationalism stands as the false kind of subjectivism to Sri Aurobindo.⁵³³

The first danger lies within the evolutionary steps of individualism into subjectivism. Here the question is – how the subjective age can emerge out of the individualistic stage in the process of its evolution?⁵³⁴ The second danger lies within the realm of the question how to transform the error of individualistic egoism to turn into a great communal or subjective egoism.⁵³⁵ For understanding these two dangers and to discover the road ahead to true subjectivism we have to go through two psychic truths one by one. The two psychic truths lead us towards the road of true subjectivism; where we can realize our own identity as nothing but the manifestations of the Divine himself.⁵³⁶

- **First Psychic Truth:**

The first among these two psychic truths, according to Sri Aurobindo, is that the ego is completely different from the self.⁵³⁷ There is one ultimate self or soul and this soul is a mere portion of that universal Divinity. In this context let us quote Sri Aurobindo as following:

‘The fulfillment of the individual is not the utmost development of his egoistic intellect, vital force, physical well-being and the utmost satisfaction of his mental,

⁵³³ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “True and False Subjectivism”, p. 53-54

⁵³⁴ Ibid, p. 45

⁵³⁵ Ibid, p. 48

⁵³⁶ Ibid, p. 46-48

⁵³⁷ Ibid, p. 46

emotional, physical cravings, but the flowering of the divine in him to its utmost capacity of wisdom, power, love and universality and through this flowering his utmost realisation of all the possible beauty and delight of existence.⁵³⁸

Let me try to explain it in my own words. The true fact is that, if we evaluate this quotation from Sri Aurobindo's writings then we will discover that, whenever we do not have self-knowledge, we are bound to think egoistically. In the individualistic social structure, men lack proper amount of self-knowledge and hence are bound to act as if dominated by ego. The use of ego-centrism is often seen in this social stage namely individualism. In that stage everybody has to think only for the satisfaction of his own. Hence the existence of ego is mandatory here. But in subjectivism, the presence of self-knowledge is always predominant as it is the core of subjectivity. Hence in this supreme stage the existence of ego is completely impossible and no men can be able to think egoistically. The presence of "I-ness" or "Ego-ness", in the sense of individual ego-ness, has to be totally demolished here.

From this above discussion it is truly felt that the true individual identity does not stand for ego, but for the divine individuality. The satisfaction of the true individuality, as felt by Sri Aurobindo, is thus not the case of satisfaction of the mere ego, rather that of the deepest truth to be aimed at.⁵³⁹ Briefly speaking by the

⁵³⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "True and False Subjectivism", p. 46

⁵³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 46

help of this first psychic truth he clearly established the ultimate difference between ego and self.

- **Second Psychic Truth:**

The second psychic truth is that, in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo, the individual has to understand that he is not only working as himself in his solidarity, but also has to work as a part of universality.⁵⁴⁰ The feeling of universality has to grow within him in this crucial stage of human society. A true subjectivism, according to Sri Aurobindo, has to lead to the twice truths:

Firstly, I (in the sense of ‘self’) ≠ individual ego i.e. an individual is not a mere ego at all; rather it is a higher self than our ordinary ego.⁵⁴¹ Self or soul, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the divine manifestation of the ‘universal Divinity’⁵⁴² and ego is far from that divine manifestation of self or soul.

Secondly, I (in the sense of ‘self’) = collective ego. This collective ego, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, is not the collective portion of each and every individual ego but of God himself.⁵⁴³ This ‘I’ has to be that Supreme Being residing not only within an individual, but also collectively within entire human race. An individual, according to him, cannot live long separately and so he needs to live collectively with every

⁵⁴⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “True and False Subjectivism”, p. 47

⁵⁴¹ Ibid, p. 46

⁵⁴² Ibid, p. 46

⁵⁴³ Ibid, p. 47-48

other member of the universe.⁵⁴⁴ Hence the Supreme Being has to be expressed not only by individuality, but also by collectivity or universality. Only by such realization of our inner union with the entire human race, in his view, we can understand the true nature of our self-being.⁵⁴⁵

Now let me quote Sri Aurobindo's own opinion in the support of the above derivation of mine:

‘This is what a true subjectivism teaches us, - first, that we are a higher self than our ego or our members, secondly, that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others; for there is a secret solidarity which our egoism may kick at and strive against, but from which we cannot escape. It is the old Indian discovery that our real “I” is a Supreme Being which is our true self and which it is our business to discover and consciously become and, secondly, that that Being is one in all, expressed in the individual and in the collectivity, and only by admitting and realising our unity with others can we entirely fulfill our true self-being’.⁵⁴⁶

In my evaluation the idea of collective salvation can also be easily derivable from here. If the concept ‘I’ stands for collective ego, then the idea of individual salvation can be emerged as collective salvation of mankind following the idea of Sri Aurobindo's 2nd psychic truth.

⁵⁴⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “True and False Subjectivism”, p. 47

⁵⁴⁵ Ibid, p. 47

⁵⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 47-48

With the help of these two psychic truths we can reach towards true subjectivism. Unless if we fail to differentiate between ego and self like that of Nazi Germany then the subjectivism achieved by us will remain as the instance of false subjectivism. In this context I have to go with the concept of Sri Aurobindo.

F. Subjective Stage and Life Divine: Road Ahead:

Among the five historical stages of human society i.e. symbolic, typical, conventional, individualistic and subjective, the last stage i.e. the subjective stage stands in the highest realm in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo.⁵⁴⁷ It has, according to him, an immediate connection with the Divinity hidden within the human nature.⁵⁴⁸ In the subjective stage of human life, human beings gather self-knowledge about themselves and this criterion of self-knowledge helps them adequately to identify the inner divinity which remains unknown by us in other circumstances of life. Hence the subjective stage is the road which makes us ahead towards Sri Aurobindo's most cherished dream of Life Divine.⁵⁴⁹

But how is it possible? Is not subjectivism the end of human cycle preached by Sri Aurobindo? In his writings there remains immense possibility to go ahead of the subjective stage of society.⁵⁵⁰ In that final stage, as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo, we have to re-discover the true self, luminous self or secret Godhead hidden within

⁵⁴⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Cycle of Society", p. 6

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid, "The Objective and Subjective Views of Life", p. 62

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 62

⁵⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 62

every human being.⁵⁵¹ Let me explain this position clearly. In the subjective stage we have to identify ourselves from within. The subjective stage is actually our journey from the outward or external world [may be the physical world] towards the inward or the internal world [the mental world]. In the individualistic stage an individual has to identify his own individuality devoid of any communal feeling. But in the subjective stage every individual has to identify himself with other human beings as all are representatives of the same Almighty or the *Brahman*. We all, at this final stage, has to identify us with God. Thus in the former individualistic stage, individual is not equal to God and in the final or subjective stage individual stands for God himself. It sounds similar with the main theme of the *Advaita Vedanta* philosophy – “*jīva Brahmaībo nā para*” i.e. individual is nothing else but God himself. The echo of the same could be discovered in the *Gita* when in verse 20 of the 10th chapter Sri Krishna spoke to Arjuna:

ahamātmā guḍākeśa sarvabhūtāśayasthitah

ahamādiśca madhyañca bhūtānāmanta eva ca ||10/20||

[O Guḍākeśa (Arjuna), I am the one and only divine soul hidden within all human beings. I am the cause behind their creation and also of destruction.]

That is the true identity of every human being and he has to relate himself with this supreme reality. In the individualistic stage men due to his egoistic nature fails to know this ultimate reality. He thinks himself as the supreme power of the world due to the sheer existence of *avidyā* or Ignorance. But in the last stage i.e. the subjective

⁵⁵¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “The Objective and Subjective Views of Life”, p. 62

stage, according to Sri Aurobindo, one has to identify the hidden Divinity or the Secret Godhead within.⁵⁵² Then due to the awakening of his proper consciousness about his inner world, *avidyā* diminishes and he can easily co-relate himself with the *Brahman*. Thus there remains no difference between men and Supreme at this stage. In this way human life can go beyond its own limited boundary and can be merged with Sri Aurobindo's dream of the Life Divine. Therefore the necessity of subjective stage lies in its going beyond itself and discovering the secret Godhead or Life Divine of the entire human race.⁵⁵³

In the conclusion let me consider some serious criticisms made against Aurobindian thesis of five historical stages. The theory relating to the five social stages of Sri Aurobindo is thought by the critics as anti-realistic. Realism is that theory which can be applicable in reality. The controversy arises regarding the prediction of Sri Aurobindo's five social stages. The five social stages were considered by him as the gateway of Life Divine. Critics ask questions regarding the nature and duration of such historical stages. In its answer let me make it clear first that conventional, typical and symbolic stages were established by Sri Aurobindo with proper examples from history of India and Europe. The present political scenario where we are living is predicted by him as the rational or individualistic stage. In this stage we give so much emphasis over our reasoning power that we have to accept this social stage as the individualistic stage as following Sri Aurobindo. However the duration of this stage was never predicted by him. The final historical stage i.e. the subjective stage

⁵⁵² Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Objective and Subjective Views of Life", p. 62

⁵⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 62

is yet to come but when will it come into reality or whether it will actually come into reality or not is never declared by him. Sri Aurobindo just predicted about the five social stages of human cycle. The necessity behind his preaching for such stages is to describe the way of attaining true individual identity of us. When men can become free from the grasp of ignorance or *avidyā* then only he can identify himself as the manifestation of God. Man's transcendence into Superman, by realizing his unity with that of the Divine, is his main subject of discussion here. The hidden spiritual overtone of his theory can prove him as day-dreamer to critics but this line of thought should not be entertained by us. It is not ethical to call this theory as anti-realism until we can see the ultimate result of Aurobindian thesis of five historical stages.

Problem is that whether the subjective stage, as the gateway of Life Divine, will be possible at all in reality is not known till now. In the view of Sri Aurobindo after some time when we will be bored from this over-use of our rationalistic attitude we can seek to recognize our true identity. Then, according to him, by breaking the shackles of ignorance we can understand our divine union with God. But what if we never understand the necessity of rejecting rationalism as an exaggerated form? What if we, fully occupied by our materialistic attitude towards life, ignore the call of the Divine in the form of our conscience or *Chaitya Purusha* (*Caitya Puruṣa*)? There is hardly any answer.

However the question remains static: how could we go towards the final historical stage? In answer we must accept that there remains immense possibility to go ahead to the subjective stage of society from the current one where we are living. In the

present historical stage we are satisfied with the discovery of the physical world; while the subjective stage is actually our journey from the external world or the physical world towards the internal world. In the individualistic stage an individual has to identify his own individuality devoid of any communal feeling. However in the subjective stage every individual has to identify himself with other human beings, devoid of their nationalistic identity, as all are the representatives of the same Almighty or *Brahman* as viewed by Sri Aurobindo. It is true that individualistic stage can have some amount of national feelings hidden within, but the subjective stage is actually the symbol of internationalism. Here via the help of universal brotherhood the sense of universalism or internationalism can be awakened. However the actual process of attaining divinity does not stop in this subjective stage. The feeling has to grow from the limits of individuality to communality and the realization of inner divinity of all individuals will be helpful to make the life of all into Life Divine.⁵⁵⁴ Therefore subjective stage is truly interpreted as the basis of making Life Divine by Sri Aurobindo.

As per my observation goes the way towards Life Divine is not an easy way to be achieved. At the end of subjectivism we should start searching for our true self namely luminous self, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, i.e. the secret Godhead inherent within.⁵⁵⁵ According to him, there is the possibility of going beyond the subjective stage and the coming of Life Divine where our main aim is to identify the secret Godhead not only as an individual but also as the entire community. In

⁵⁵⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "The Objective and Subjective Views of Life", p. 62

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p. 62

this way subjective stage may serve as the gateway of the appearance of the divine race upon earth. For doing this, in his view, we have to call the Divine to come upon the earthen level. But how could we call forth the Supermind and how could we make our lives the Life Divine? The procedure is still unknown to us. The lack of proper example also makes it difficult to be grasped.

Many critics consider that the road towards spirituality through the five social stages is a mere utopia. Indeed it is not an easy task to search for our inner divinity while living in this materialistic world. The search for the road towards collective salvation and Life Divine is not at all a simple task. Till now none could achieve this. Hence the road towards Life Divine, as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, remains in the utopian state till now. But it is our responsibility to prove the world that the road of achieving Life Divine, however looking impossible, is certainly not a utopia. It is not achieved till date but that does not indicate that it is impossible to be achieved in reality. Sri Aurobindo just showed us the road and nested this herculean task in our shoulders to make it possible in reality. We can call him a day-dreamer but actually as a guide he has done his part with competence. Now it is our task to make it possible in reality.

Conclusion

Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought has so much depth and extension that it is not easy to establish its uniqueness within the span of a short dissertation. As a politician, Sri Aurobindo tried to reformulate the idea of national unity which was the urgent requirement of the period for the unification of the nation. A nation must have national unity to display. Sri Aurobindo, as we have already discussed, considered nation in the sense of nation-state. From our discussion it is clear that Sri Aurobindo unlike many political thinkers never overemphasized only the role of political unity. According to Karl Popper, one of such prominent political thinkers, a nation-state has some amount of political unity to bind it together with all odds of religious, customary, caste and sect-related differences of a nation. However due to the external political domination of people residing in a nation the concept of nation-state sounded as utopian to Popper.⁵⁵⁶ This theory is completely opposite to that of Sri Aurobindo. If we evaluate Sri Aurobindo's thought, then we will discover two different types of unity has been advocated by him – centripetal or inner psychological unity and loose external kind of political unity named centrifugal unity. A state has loose political unity externally imposed upon; while, according to Sri Aurobindo, a nation has certain amount of inner unity hidden within.⁵⁵⁷ For him, political unity is never the main characteristic feature of a

⁵⁵⁶ Popper, Karl, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, Vol. II, 5th edition, p. 51

⁵⁵⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "Nation and Empire: Real and Political Unities", p. 36

nation. Hence Sri Aurobindo's idea of national unity can never be compared with that of political unity.

Then can we consider it as a religious unity? While going through Sri Aurobindo's theory of *sanatana dharma*, we can evaluate it as the eternal religion.⁵⁵⁸ It is thought to be somewhat similar to that of Swami Vivekananda's theory of universal religion. But unlike Vivekananda he never considered Hinduism based on practical *Vedanta* as the eternal religion. Eternal religion of Sri Aurobindo is supporting essential aspects of all religions. It is the essence of all religions. It is like Plato's 'form' from where we can derive the structure of all traditional religions, be it Hinduism or Islam or Judaism. In this respect Sri Aurobindo's theory of eternal religion is closer to the religious views of Ramkrishna Paramhansa than that of Vivekananda. Many political thinkers took Aurobindian theory of eternal religion in the sense of religious nationalism as he gave immense emphasis over the uses of Hindu religious symbols. But, as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo, Hinduism is the model of this eternal religion but it surely supersedes Hinduism having merely the body and form of it.⁵⁵⁹ It is true that, according to Sri Aurobindo, nationalism stands as the religion of God⁵⁶⁰ but in his view religion is that *dharma* which has to bear the individual. Therefore it would not be impractical to declare that his religion is

⁵⁵⁸ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, "The Ideal of the Karmayogin", p. 2

⁵⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 5

⁵⁶⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 653

none but the religion of humanity and his preached national unity stands for nothing else but human unity of all citizens of the nation itself.⁵⁶¹

What is the way to reach this human unity? In its answer we have to start with the notion of freedom. Every individual has inner seeking for freedom. Freedom and unity are two important basic desires of every individual being. Individual freedom is the way of achieving unity with others residing in the same group, society, nation or even universe. Human unity cannot be obtained if we do not get enough freedom. An individual needs to reside in a society with all other members. Man, as a social being, cannot live apart from his group; e.g. the family, or clan, or village, or nation. Individual freedom is necessary but on that ground it is not permissible for one individual's freedom to hamper the freedom of others living in the same society. Sri Aurobindo's suggestion was to think about collective freedom. Individual freedom would thus serve as the gateway for achieving collective freedom of the society, of the nation and also of the entire universe.

An individual cannot grow solely; rather he has to live in a group. In the similar way a nation cannot grow naturally if it grows solely. The development of one nation will pose huge threat over the nationality of other nations. We can think of uniting a nation in completely two different ways – one is centrifugal or external unity which should be mainly based on the economic and political creeds of a nation to be unified; while the other is centripetal or inner psychological unity i.e. is the unity among individuals. The centrifugal unity is loose in nature because the

⁵⁶¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle, The Ideal of Human Unity, War and Self-Determination*, Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram, 3rd edition, p. 305

economic and political creeds fail to bind the people living within the boundary of the same nation together. Hence it has to meet a natural death after some certain period of time. But the centripetal unity or inner unity is not dependent on any kind of external imposition. When all residents of a nation can feel the national unity, in the sense of human unity as conceived by Sri Aurobindo, then this unity should not be the external type. A nation needs to advocate for such centripetal unity among its residents. The individuality of an individual can be improved by cultivating his relationship with other individuals; in the same way the nationality of a nation can be improved by cultivating its relationship with that of other nations. This hidden sense of internationalism as well as transcendentalism, which are touched upon in my thesis in the previous chapter, is prevalent behind the social-political thought of Sri Aurobindo. This attitude of Sri Aurobindo to go beyond the realm of nationalism to internationalism is considered as his post-colonial attitude by Sati Chatterjee in her book *Sri Aurobindo: A Post-Colonial Reader*.

When we are talking about psychological unity in the context of Sri Aurobindo, we must be cautious in not taking ‘psychological’ in the sense of ordinary psychology. His theory of psychological unity is conceived as the human unity or the unity of hearts of all residents of the nation.⁵⁶² Political, cultural or religious unity is not to be preached as the national unity in the opinion of Sri Aurobindo. In his vision, a mere political or cultural unity is not an adequate cause of evoking psychological unity of a nation. A nation which has to be based upon political creeds, religious or

⁵⁶² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, ‘Palli Samiti’, p. 887

cultural similarities can only give birth to a false nationalistic attitude like that of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. If it ever happens then the dream of human unity, in the sense of political or cultural unity, has to be based upon the thirst of power. So Sri Aurobindo adequately considered that the concept of national unity of a nation should tend towards none the less but the human unity.

According to Sri Aurobindo national unity, succeeding to human unity, has been supposed to go through five different social stages. For understanding the growth of human rationality we have to comprehend these five social stages. This dependency over human psychology helps Sri Aurobindo to call them as psychological stages of human cycle. In common sense reason is the ultimate goal of human life; while in Sri Aurobindo's consideration it is not the only controller of human mind. He considered it as a gateway of achieving supra-rationality. If a person is controlled solely by his reasoning power then the voice of super-ego or *viveka* (conscience) remains unheard. Western science stops to the realm of reason while the uniqueness of Aurobindian thesis is that it supersedes the realm of reason for a better realm. An individual has to enquire for the subjective secret or true identity of one's own being and of the entire world. Then he will understand that the reasoning faculty of his mind has some ultimate limitation which he has to get rid of for identifying himself. That is the reason of Sri Aurobindo's never stopping within the arena of reason while discussing about the five social stages of human society. His theory of national unity actually supersedes the criteria of nationalism and enters into the arena of internationalism. However most astonishingly he never got stuck within the fold of internationalism as inter-nationalistic approach could also give birth

towards false subjective attitude along with the true one. His Life Divine is the ultimate goal of internationalism where men have to reside with each other without any preconceived bias or prejudice regarding sect, class, group, custom, religion or national difference. This was connoted by him as Kingdom of Heaven closely connected with Gandhian thesis of Kingdom of God.⁵⁶³

There arises controversy regarding the characteristic feature of Sri Aurobindo's thesis of nationalism. Is it just Hindu revivalism or something more than that? Romila Thapar mentioned that Sri Aurobindo, being influenced by Bankim, was attempting the regeneration of India on the basis of reviving the ancient glory of Hinduism.⁵⁶⁴ Hence, according to her, the characteristic feature of Sri Aurobindo's nationalism is based upon Hindu revivalism. It is often believed that the tenets of Hindu revivalism have its origin in the writings of Bankim and Vivekananda. Bankim's depiction that the political regeneration of India has to be dependent upon its cultural tradition is viewed as one of the sources of Hindu revivalist attitude. In his *Dharmatattva* he considered patriotism as equal to pure self-surrender to God.⁵⁶⁵ Sri Aurobindo's notion of self-surrender to the national agitation as a plan made by the Almighty⁵⁶⁶ was clearly influenced by Bankim. In Bankim's *Anandamath* he worshipped motherland as goddess and created a group of *sannyasins* who have to be prepared to die for the sake of gaining its freedom from foreign hands. Most

⁵⁶³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Demand of the Mother", p. 853

⁵⁶⁴ Thapar, Romila, *The Past and Prejudice*, p. 13

⁵⁶⁵ Chatterjee, Bankim Chandra, *Essentials of Dharma*, p. 160

⁵⁶⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 653

critics discover the influence of Bankim's *Anandamath* upon Sri Aurobindo's secret revolutionary activities. Sri Aurobindo was tremendously fascinated by the political works of Bankim as in his view Bankim, through his political writings, influenced the national mind of Indians.⁵⁶⁷ The Chicago conference lectures of Swami Vivekananda were reflections of his discovery of Hinduism as the best religion of the entire world. Vivekananda mentioned clearly that every improvement in India requires the upheaval in religion.⁵⁶⁸ *Vedanta* is the perfect example of universal religion to him and hence his theory of nationalism is considered as the concept of Hindu revivalism based on *Vedantism*.

But if we go in depth of Sri Aurobindo's theory of nationalism then we will discover that even being influenced by Bankim and Vivekananda Sri Aurobindo never take nationalism in the sense of Hindu revivalism. Some historians like Amallesh Tripathi conceived that in the theory of Sri Aurobindo religion stood as the means of fulfilling nationalism.⁵⁶⁹ But the truth is just opposite of that. Hindu revivalism is dependent upon religion as its base. Sri Aurobindo's nationalism certainly has a spiritual overtone but to him spirituality is never similar to religion. Spirituality stands for him as true religion which has somewhat superior position than that of religion.⁵⁷⁰ Religion, to him, is the starting-point of spirituality but never equal to it. Nationalism, according to Sri Aurobindo, stands for *sanatana*

⁵⁶⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library (SABCL)*, Vol. 1, p. 101

⁵⁶⁸ Swami Vivekananda, *The Complete Works of Swami Vivekananda*, Vol. 3, p. 221

⁵⁶⁹ Tripathy, Amallesh, *The Extremist Challenge: India between 1890 and 1910*, p. 73

⁵⁷⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "Religions as the Law of Life", p. 177-178

dharma or eternal religion but this eternal religion is not Hinduism. Hinduism is certainly free from religious bias and prejudice unlike Islam and it has no church-like controlling authority unlike Christianity. But, in his vision, Hinduism is just an archetype of eternal religion but not equal to it.⁵⁷¹ The wider sense of Hinduism which can incorporate all religions like Islam, Judaism and Buddhism is considered as universal religion by him. The *sanatana (sanātana) dharma*, advocated by him, has to be dependent not only on Hindu scriptures, but also on the Koran and the Bible. Therefore we can claim that nationalism in the interpretation of Sri Aurobindo never stands in equal position as with Hindu revivalism.

However, according to Sri Aurobindo, like Tilak, national unity of India was not imposed by the Western culture. B.G. Tilak in his books *The Orion*, 1893 and *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, 1903 gave arguments to establish that the origin of the Aryan race was from the Arctic region. In support of his claim he cited some hymns from the *Vedas*. He tried to prove the self-sufficiency of Indian culture by citing that before 800 BCE the Aryan civilization was far better than that of the Stone Age of West.⁵⁷² Western influence is unnecessary to him for proving the supremacy of Indian culture.⁵⁷³ In Maharashtra, the organization of Ganapati *utsav* and Shivaji festival were also cited as prominent examples supporting Tilak's claim for the prevalence of national consciousness depending on the Indian culture. Sri

⁵⁷¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of the Karmayogin*, "The Ideal of the Karmayogin", p. 5

⁵⁷² Tilak, B.G., *The Arctic Home in the Vedas*, p. 1-2

⁵⁷³ Wolpert, A.S., *Tilak and Gokhale: Revolution and Reforms in the Making of Modern India*, p. 64-65

Aurobindo's line of thought was somewhat similar to that of Tilak. He also conceived that Indian nationalism was already present in the Indian history even before the British invasion. The Indian history, in his view, was dominated by the Rajputs, the Shikhs and the Maratha uprisings in India.⁵⁷⁴ It was thought by him a misleading concept that Indian national uprising happened only after the coming of the British merchants in India. Truly we cannot say that Indian nationalism is incomplete before the renaissance of the West touching Indian soil. Western impact over Indian education certainly makes Indian citizens to comprehend the value of Indian culture but no more contribution of West over India is at all accepted by Sri Aurobindo. The positive feature of Western culture, as conceived by him, is that it owes its centuries of strength, vigor, light, progress and irresistible expansion.⁵⁷⁵ But, according to him, the way of achieving human unity would be ultimately reachable through the progression of the Eastern culture. India is, according to him, actually spiritually far more cultivated than the West. Hence the discovery of Indian spiritual excellence advocated by him is actually the rediscovery of it.

But even though in the consideration of Sri Aurobindo Indian nationalism is the paradigm for effecting human unity, he does not accept it as the ultimate limit. What is the role of India in achieving this human unity? Uniformity between several nations and individuals cannot be considered as real unity. Uniformity of nations has to be loose in nature imposed from outside depending on economic or political

⁵⁷⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Renaissance in India and Other Essays on Indian Culture*, "Indian Polity - 4", p. 431

⁵⁷⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle* included in *Social and Political Thought, Sri Aurobindo Birth Centenary Library* (SABCL), Vol. 15, Chapter II, p. 11

creeds. Unity of a nation with others, on the contrary, has to be based on inner psychological bonding of its citizens. When you force uniformity between nations then it will give birth to hegemony of one over others. But if we preach for unity between nations then the inner psychological bonding among individuals has to be cultivated. Man is essentially spiritual in nature. The human unity among individuals could be achieved only when we can discover their true selves. This true self of the individual is, as following Sri Aurobindo, neither his body, nor his ego, nor his reasoning power. The true self of an individual resides in identifying his and other individuals' union with the Divine. However, according to Sri Aurobindo, an individual cannot realize his true self separately. Here we need to preach for human unity. This human unity has to be based upon the spiritual realization of unity among men. In this context, according to Sri Aurobindo, Indians have to serve as the spiritual guide due to its pre-achieved spiritual excellence.⁵⁷⁶ For gaining human unity, in his view, Indian nationality thus works as a perfect example.⁵⁷⁷

The theory of Aurobindian nationalism has been nicknamed as religious nationalism by Peter Heehs.⁵⁷⁸ However the question remains whether such characterization would be adequate or not. In the light of present discussions it seems quite adequate to call his kind of nationalism as spiritual nationalism. According to Heehs, Sri Aurobindo, influenced by Vivekananda, tried to format the

⁵⁷⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "Swaraj and the Coming Anarchy", p. 731

⁵⁷⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, "An Open Letter to My Countrymen", p. 158

⁵⁷⁸ Heehs, Peter, *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History*, p. 100-101

thesis of nationalism on the basis of religion. Hence the nationalism preached by Sri Aurobindo, as argued by Heehs, stood for religious nationalism. The reasoning provided by Heehs is quite absurd as, according to him, the use of Hindu religious terms and symbols by Sri Aurobindo transforms it into a kind of religious nationalism. However the contradictory view can also be drawn from his own writings. Heehs in his book *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism* wrote that according to Sri Aurobindo, Indian soul was preeminently spiritual.⁵⁷⁹ My observation and understanding of the writings of Sri Aurobindo suggest that we can derive a sort of spiritual nationalism from it. I am in the favor of using Sri Aurobindo's nationalism in the sense of spiritual nationalism. The nationalism preached by Sri Aurobindo was indeed called by him as a creed or *dharma*.⁵⁸⁰ But this *dharma*, as accepted by him, is completely different from religion. Sri Aurobindo's nationalism is universal religion or *sanatana (sanātana) dharma* which is not limited within the narrow boundary of any religion. Spiritual goal hidden behind his social-political thought gave it a spiritual color therefore it will not be irrelevant to call his nationalism as spiritual nationalism. Hence I cannot override the possibility of looking towards Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought from the spiritual perspective.

The reason behind describing Aurobindian nationalism as spiritual nationalism is that, in his view, spirituality holds higher position than that of religion. If we go through the views of Sri Aurobindo then we will discover that religion, in his

⁵⁷⁹ Heehs, Peter, *Nationalism, Terrorism, Communalism: Essays in Modern Indian History*, p. 99

⁵⁸⁰ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Present Situation", p. 652

opinion, has two forms – religionism and spiritualism; of the two, the latter is conceived as ‘true religion’ by him.⁵⁸¹ Spirituality, in his view, deals with ultimate union of the *jīvātman* and *Paramatman (Paramātmān)* via evoking our inner being or Psychic being (*Caitya Purusha*). Religionism, according to Sri Aurobindo, is the way towards spiritualism. His ultimate goal is to reach towards the Life Divine or the Kingdom of Heaven⁵⁸² which religions fail to achieve. Hence it is not inappropriate to call Aurobindian nationalism as spiritual nationalism instead of religious nationalism.

In the conclusion I have also tried to seek answers to some tricky questions that have arisen from various discussions regarding the chapters of my dissertation. All of these questions are related to the hidden spiritual touch behind the social-political thought. One such question is how could we relate Sri Aurobindo’s social-political theory of *swaraj* to that of Indian political movement if we interpret it in spiritual sense? In Sri Aurobindo’s theory *Swaraj* as freedom or *mukti* stands in the sense of *sarvam paravasham duhkham sarvam atmavasham sukham*: all dependence upon others is the cause of misery, while all dependence upon us is blissful.⁵⁸³ In this way the political sense of freedom took the spiritual shape of *mukti* or *mokṣa*.

Doubts and skepticism may take birth centering Aurobindian thesis of boycott. Boycott is commonly conceived as a mere political weapon to resist the oppression

⁵⁸¹ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, “Religion as the Law of Life”, p. 177-178

⁵⁸² Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Demand of the Mother”, p. 853

⁵⁸³ Sri Aurobindo, *Speeches*, “Swadeshi & Boycott”, p. 42

of the opposite party. But, according to Sri Aurobindo, boycott movement, in its spiritual sense, seems to be *dharma yudhha* for every Indian. Boycott, as a tool of such political agitation, is to be used as the bow of the *Kshatriya (Kṣatriya)* in this endeavor.⁵⁸⁴ In this *dharma yudhha* or just war all Indians have to participate in their ways as it is considered by Sri Aurobindo as his own *svadharma*. In this way spirituality is beautifully incorporated by him in his social-political doctrine named boycott.

Another question is how could we incorporate spirituality with that of resistance movement in India? The reason behind Indian political emancipation at that time in pre-independent India, in the disguise of great and holy *yajña*, is to drive out the *rakshas (rākṣas)* or foreign rulers out of our country. For driving them out of India we need tools to be employed: namely the *brahmatejas* of the *rishis (ṛṣis)* and also the bow of the *Kshatriyas*.⁵⁸⁵ The *brahmatejas* of the *rishis* symbolically stands for passive resistance while the bow of the *Kshatriyas (Kṣatriyas)* stands for active resistance as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo.

The next question is how could we incorporate spirituality with the social-political concept like national education? The Mother following Sri Aurobindo showed us the path to recognize our psychic being or *Chaitya Purusha (Caitya Puruṣa)* with the help of psychic education and the divine union with *Sachchidanada* via the spiritual kind of education.

⁵⁸⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “The Doctrine of Passive Resistance: Conclusions”, p. 122

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid*, p. 122

The next question is how could we correlate a social tool like village reconstruction with that of spirituality? The divine union with the *Brahman* cannot be possible in individual life if we remain indifferent to the pains and sufferings of others existing in the same village. A *jīvanmukta puruṣha* (*puruṣa*) hence has to follow the path of *lokasamgraha* as depicted in the *Gita*. In this way Aurobindian theory of village reconstruction has spiritual touch hidden behind.

In the sixth chapter on Life Divine I have focused on the spirituality inherent within the thesis of the five historical stages as envisioned by Sri Aurobindo. This chapter discusses how in the subjective stage of human life human beings by the help of self-knowledge can identify their inner divinity and in this way this stage can help us to reach Life Divine or the Kingdom of Heaven⁵⁸⁶ as conceived by Sri Aurobindo. This spiritual overtone behind Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought helps me to consider his theory of nationalism as spiritual nationalism.

The emphasis over spiritual overtone of Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought works behind naming the nationalism advocated by him as spiritual nationalism. Sri Aurobindo's nationalism certainly has a spiritual overtone but to him spirituality is never similar with religion. Spirituality stood for him as true religion which has somewhat superior position than that of religion.⁵⁸⁷ Therefore I am in favor of characterizing Sri Aurobindo's nationalism as spiritual nationalism. But let me make it clear that in my opinion he is not behaving like a mystic or *yogi* rather as a

⁵⁸⁶ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Demand of the Mother", p. 853

⁵⁸⁷ Sri Aurobindo, *The Human Cycle*, "Religions as the Law of Life", p. 177-178

national leader preaching for Indian independence in the context of his social-political thought. Spirituality actually serves the basis of his social-political thought. His advocacy for spirituality is nothing but a way to achieve Indian independence. It is just a political strategy. He advocated nationalism in the sense of religion of God as it seemed to him the proper way to encourage Indian youths to be indulged into politics. The example is the pamphlet named *Bhawani Mandir*.⁵⁸⁸

Sri Aurobindo was mostly thought to be a *yogi* by critics. This idea is certainly very wrong as we can show several evidences that even after his departure to Pondicherry and his so-called retirement from politics he is never seen to be reluctant to whatever situations that aroused in Indian political sphere till death. He was indeed quite knowledgeable about the political circumstances all over the world till his death on 1950; whether it the first or second World Wars or the Indian independence in 1947.⁵⁸⁹ He, thus could be said, was never to have retired from active politics at all. He was politically very active till his death as we got several examples of this position. He revised his book *The Ideal of Human Unity* in 1949 in the context of first and second World Wars and included his own estimation about the changing scenario of international politics in the footnotes. He welcomed the Cripps Mission in the early 1940. He even in 1947, after India's gaining

⁵⁸⁸ *Bhawani Mandir* was written by Sri Aurobindo, as influenced by Bankim's *Anandamath*, in the insistence of Barin Ghosh to encourage the secret revolutionaries of Bengal.

⁵⁸⁹ Navajata, *Sri Aurobindo*, p. 46-47

independence, delivered a long message where he predicted this political freedom of India as the first step towards the achievement of its spiritual liberty.⁵⁹⁰

I do not advocate the trend of distinguishing his life-time into two different time-spans, namely as the Nationalist leader and politician in the first half and as the profound mystic and *yogi* at the latter half of his life till death. It is actually an easy assumption that never takes concrete shape in reality. His several political writings, e.g. *Bande Mataram*, *The Speeches*, *The Ideal of Human Unity* and *The Human Cycle* published chronologically after his retirement in Pondicherry in the newspaper named *Arya*.⁵⁹¹ These books define the political thoughts of Sri Aurobindo more clearly than his previously published articles and pamphlet like 'New Lamps for Old' published in newspaper *Induprakash*, edited by K.G. Deshpande, from 1893-1894; *Bhawani Mandir* (pamphlet) written secretly from 1902-1906, 'The Doctrine of Passive Resistance' published chronologically in the newspaper daily *Bande Mataram* in 1907 etc.⁵⁹² I am pointing this only in the sense of clarifying my point that Sri Aurobindo never retire from active politics at least from the mental level. His later political writings are far better than his previous ones. His previous political writings are mainly focused on showing protest against the ongoing British government; while his later writings are, on the contrary, focused on the social basis of this political doctrine. In this later writings of him the

⁵⁹⁰ Navajata, *Sri Aurobindo*, p. 47-48

⁵⁹¹ *Arya*, English weekly Newspaper, Editor Sri Aurobindo (*The Ideal of Human Unity* first published here from 1915-1918, *The Human Cycle* first published here from 1916-1918, *A Preface of National Education* first published here from 1920-1921), Pondicherry, 1915-1921.

⁵⁹² All these early written political articles of Sri Aurobindo were later incorporated in a book named *Bande Mataram* by Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Pondicherry in 1972.

main intention behind the preaching for political liberty of the nation lies in the attainment of political liberty of an individual. A nation cannot be free unless its citizens are free from every kind of political bondage and a person cannot gain his political freedom unless he attains his freedom of soul which can be considered by Sri Aurobindo as spiritual freedom.⁵⁹³ Spiritual freedom of an individual also helps to gain the spiritual freedom or freedom of soul the nation. In this way the attainment of spiritual freedom of an individual along with the nation serves as the gateway of achieving the political freedom of the individual as well as the nation. This concept is clearly advocated by Sri Aurobindo in his later writings.

His two books – *The Human Cycle* (1918) and *The Ideal of Human Unity* (1919) pave the way for linking nationalism to internationalism and also beyond. First in his political doctrine we get acquainted with the concept of nation-state and this nation-state is considered as a necessary stage for the development towards the human unity. In this way, an individual may be successful to make his individual life into the so-desired Life Divine of Sri Aurobindo. The human unity cannot be achieved by the financial, administrative, religious or economical advancement process; but through the inner process of growth of human race which can be somewhat mental and ethical in nature. Thus the eternal religion or *sanatana dharma* of humanity can spring from the inner law of human advancement. Every development of nature is slow in speed and tends to fade out of some definite reasons. Current phase of human history has been supposed to possess two equal

⁵⁹³ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, “Swaraj”, p. 700

forces. First, an inner force of interconnection and interaction between the human races; and second, a common uniting force to unite smaller units to that of the larger elements by using external forces. In the idea of world government the trial for unification employing the external force is prevalent. Sri Aurobindo, in the article ‘The Idea of a League of Nations’ has clearly stated that – ‘The only means that readily suggests itself by which a necessary group-freedom can be preserved and yet the unification of the human race achieved, is to strive not towards a closely organised World-State, but towards a free, elastic and progressive world-union.’⁵⁹⁴ Thus Sri Aurobindo was strongly against the conventional idea of the world government or world-state. Instead he used the term world-union. The nations, in his view, should be interrelated from hearts. That means the union among the nations should be the inner psychological type of union among their individuals. Let me quote from Sri Aurobindo in my favor – ‘A free world-union must in its very nature be a complex unity based on a diversity and that diversity must be based on free self-determination. A mechanical Unitarian system would regard... mankind as one single nation and it would try to efface the old separative national spirit altogether; it would arrange its system probably by continents and subdivide the continents by convenient geographical demarcations. In this other quite opposite idea, the geographical, the physical principle of union would be subordinated to a psychological principle; for not a mechanical division, but to a living diversity would be its object. If this object is to be secured, the peoples of humanity must be allowed to group themselves according to their free-will and their natural affinities;

⁵⁹⁴ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, “The Idea of a League of Nations”, p. 253

no constraint or force could be allowed to compel an unwilling nation or district grouping of peoples to enter into another system or join itself or remain joined to it for the convenience, aggrandisement or political necessity of another people or even for the general convenience, in disregard of its own wishes... Unity would be the largest principle of life, but freedom would be its foundation-state.⁵⁹⁵ This is actually the notion of Sri Aurobindo's world-union where he clearly advocated in favor of psychological unity among the people of several nations. The countrymen of such nations should have freedom to unite with other people belonging to other nations. That type of nations, under world-union, will be able to lead their countrymen towards the achievement of the so-desired notion of human unity. In this way with the help of Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought we can easily move towards the spiritual notions of Life Divine and universal brotherhood.

Sri Aurobindo thought that there is ultimately no difference between the Almighty and human beings. To him *jīvātman* or human beings are the mere representation of the *Paramatman* or the Divine. Every human is the limited edition of the Supreme to him. Just like the *pratibimbabāda* or reflection theory of God of the *Advaita Vedanta* discipline, where *jīva* or individual is considered as the reflection of the *Brahman*, humans, according to him, are none other but the reflections of the Almighty. Hence, in his point of view, actually man stands for God himself. But in Karl Marx there is nothing divine in the human transformation. Man can never be

⁵⁹⁵ Sri Aurobindo, *The Ideal of Human Unity*, "The Conditions of a Free world-Union", p. 270

transformed into the spiritual being to him as conceived by Sri Aurobindo.⁵⁹⁶ In this context Marxian thesis got support from the thesis of Descartes as he also rejected any chance of divinization of man. Man stands for Descartes as a complex machine made up of mind and body.⁵⁹⁷ However Marxists never admitted this mechanical theory of Descartes and so also Sri Aurobindo. The Marxists presume that the metaphysical presuppositions of Sri Aurobindo's sociology are not only superfluous but also scientifically unacceptable in nature as the process of making Life Divine is not so vivid. The followers of Sri Aurobindo, on the contrary, claim that the Marxist account of the human cycle is superfluous.⁵⁹⁸ The reasoning behind such assumption is that Marxian human cycle is influenced by Darwinian theory, but only negatively. Charles Nicolas Darwin in his *Survival of the Fittest Theory* of 1885 wrote that only the superior species gain the ability to survive, not the weaker ones. This theory is known to be the survival of the fittest theory in the history of human evolution. Marx never admitted that the weaker class has left no opportunity to live in a society. Darwinian natural selection process was never accepted by Marxists. Over imposition of the principle of natural selection is behind such objection of Marxists. However the problem with Marxian theory of human cycle is that it gives over emphasis on the economic and political exploitation of the *proletariats* or the weaker class in the hands of the richer class or bourgeoisie. Aurobindian thesis of human cycle is quite different from that. Aurobindian thesis

⁵⁹⁶ Chattopadhyaya, D.P., *Sri Aurobindo and Karl Marx: Integral Sociology and Dialectical Sociology*, p. 37

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 35

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 37

of human cycle certainly has some political implication but the main reason for preaching it is somewhat spiritual in nature. Because, in the view of Sri Aurobindo, human cycle aims at gaining *mukti* or salvation⁵⁹⁹ designated for all in the form of collective salvation. Through human cycle Sri Aurobindo showed a way to gain self-consciousness or *ātma-jñāna* of the individual as the manifestation of *Brahman*. Therefore Aurobindian human cycle thesis stands unique in position when compared with that of Cartesian and Marxian doctrines.

Critics often raise the question regarding the impracticability of Sri Aurobindo's social-political thought as it has hidden spiritual overtone. Rationalist thinkers will always ask question about the procedure of how Supermind will come to the earth or how can we call him forth. Till now there is no strong example of such happening in real life so they are free to have query about its possibility or duration. In its answer, as following D.P. Chattopadhyaya, I can say that even though Sri Aurobindo was criticized as a day-dreamer but his social-political thought with spirituality hidden within helps us a lot to be spiritually elevated.⁶⁰⁰ But how to achieve this and how to make our life a perfect example of Life Divine is solely dependent on our inner search.

⁵⁹⁹ Sri Aurobindo, *Bande Mataram*, "The Surat Congress", p. 639

⁶⁰⁰ Chattopadhyaya, D.P., "Sri Aurobindo on the curve of Polity", in D.P. Chattopadhyaya (ed.), *Philosophy of Science Phenomenology and other Essays*, p. 517

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