

**A PHILOSOPHICAL APPRAISAL OF AUROBINDO'S
CONCEPT OF SPIRITUALITY**

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF HYDERABAD IN PARTIAL
FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY IN PHILOSOPHY



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21st SEPTEMBER 2020**

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DECLARATION

I, **Vikholienuo Kire**, hereby declare that this thesis entitled '**A Philosophical Appraisal of Aurobindo's Concept of Spirituality**', submitted by me is a bona fide research work; free from plagiarism is supervised by **Prof. Venusa Tinyi**. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or full to this or any other University or Institution for the award of degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodhganga/ INFLIBNET.

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INTRODUCTION

Theme of the Study

In ancient India, spirituality had been a dominant force of culture. The ancient Indian culture stands for a variety of symbols that signify India as a spiritual glory from its very dawn. There was a capacity in the culture to reveal the inner beauty or the divine that is spirituality embedded in its culture. Though culture provides a general outlook on life, Indian culture is characterized by its connection to the development and inner life of a person to which perfection is sought.

Aurobindo a philosopher, poet, seer and a mystic is also a political thinker. He considers in depth spirituality and spiritual culture. He has given a new distinction of thought based on Indian spiritual culture. In his thought, there is a synthesis of the material west and the spiritual east. He has formulated a new theory of evolution in its emergence of the spirit of man. He revolutionized the declining culture of India and profoundly attempted to re-generate and re-live the spiritual culture of India.

The Indian culture is enticing and it speaks of the enchanting spiritual culture about the traditions and culture of India. This spiritual culture of India can however, also come to be known as religious. It can be said that Indian culture is primarily

religious. Aurobindo equated Indian religion with Hinduism and believed that Hinduism as a religion accepts all as one and is all-embracing. Therefore, Indian culture though religious in nature, would make room for all.

Indian culture is diverse, it has been molded throughout various eras, has undergone changes in time. India evolved by the vision of the seers, saints and spiritual mystics, which weaves together the unity of Indians through the ages. India as evolved through spiritual mystics, seers led to a notion of Indian culture as essentially based on spirituality. However, the spiritual glory of the past changed when it encountered other alien cultures or subjected to external forces. However, even in times of change and threat it held on to its spirituality, which was thought as being fundamental to Indian culture. In other words, spirituality lies on the heart of every Indian culture.

Context

It is important to note how changes have come about affecting the spiritual culture of India. Aurobindo was not only concerned with the change of culture but he saw external forces affected the spirituality of India. Liberty and nationalism sowed the seed of spiritual awakening in Aurobindo, which he saw was in need of a change. His quest was to bring back the lost spiritual glory of ancient India.

Aurobindo also gave a new scope to India's cultural history. He valued Indian culture more as an inner development and spirituality embedded as distinct from materiality and his ideas and thoughts prevailed in his writings. The perfection of man lay in the development of spirituality. He thus gave a unique interpretation of spirituality to Indian culture.

Western rulers had forced upon the declining condition of Indian culture according to Aurobindo. The external forces had overpowered the Indian culture, which Aurobindo feared that might put an end to the spiritual culture of India. Therefore, he

felt the need to understand the creative spirit of India in its greatness that can light the process of getting victory over other cultures.

Aurobindo's idea of the world is not physical but spiritual and he attempts to spiritualize the material world through the method of integral yoga. There is in every being a divinity and the purpose of human being is to realize the divine which is within. This realization is the spiritual capacity to transform into the divine being. The power concealed in the divine being aspires for transcendence but narrowing its realization sought for a truth that is limiting to spiritual beings and not for all. Therefore, this research will attempt to look into how it is possible to realize the divine in man and attain spirituality as with it Aurobindo also aims that it will put an end to the country's problem.

Political: As a political thinker and activist, he evolved his own political ideas and aims to raise India from the differences the westerners had with Indians. Passive resistance for him was a natural weapon that India needed at that time. Therefore, he developed a whole program of passive resistance such as voluntary boycott and the *swadeshi movement* to replace western education by Indian education, through boycott he fought for the rights of India. His aim of India's freedom remained undiminished as his most important dream. The liberation of the people could be a gift to India, which is essential for living a noble life.

However, in the process of fighting his dream of political liberation, he realized the spiritual gift of India. He believed India could take the spiritual lead of the world if Indian spirituality could be revived to its full potentiality.

His life's mission: Aurobindo had placed before his own political action, a program and an aim that could effectively put into practice, the necessity of linking the whole of human life and thought into spiritual action. This new vision embraces the spirit as

the ultimate truth and this is what Aurobindo wanted to offer the world in general and India in particular.

It was his big dream to foster a growth of integral consciousness to bring authority of the spirit over matter and life. In '*The Synthesis of Yoga*', he showed how all the *yogas* combined together can lead to the path of Supermind. The attainment of Supermind and a divine life was his ultimate goal. However, some fundamental problems that led him to his spiritual quest. The search to the problems of the national life of India, a spiritual lead and a relation between spirituality and politics led him to a unique force of action, realization and transformation. This transformation can be brought about through inner experience of the spirit. On realizing the inner experience, Aurobindo develops his integral philosophy that also grew out of his yogic practice. This development is gradually to develop a wider and a perfect evolution. At a higher level, there will be a direct vision of knowledge chiefly known to us through the spirit often amounting to a realization of the divine within man. This significance of seeking the divine being thus develops all that is best in man and leads to all round spiritual development.

It poses the question, that if spirituality is realized; does the divine realization remain in the higher level of consciousness? According to Aurobindo, spirituality once realized and attained will always come down to divinize the earth. Spirituality is inherent in Indian culture and likewise, spirituality is an inherent part of his search in seeking higher truth. The point is, spirituality is an effort to rise beyond the life of humans plunging deeper into its search in everything spiritual. The peculiarity of Indian thought is that it searches for the spirit in everything.

Art: In his attempt, to reach the divine, Aurobindo brought great attachment in art that led him to the divine. He tried to bring out in the soul of man the deep embedded truth that can explore the innermost truth of the spirit.

Art for Aurobindo was not just beauty and beautiful things but to him art is a pre-occupation of the spirit. As such, art in India does not aim at objective presentation but in attaining the divine reality. This divine reality is the soul of Indian culture. It also makes what is called the spirit of India. In ancient India, Indians considered the divine reality religious and this is an unending religious endeavor to depict the spiritual symbols and spirituality of India.

Indian art such as painting, architecture, sculpture etc. presents a comprehensive detail of the spirituality and religious life of India. The Indian artists had long been exploring the inner realities and experiences of the people, bringing out in their artistic creation a tradition rich in spirit. Thus, Aurobindo also likewise aimed to bring art experience in the form of inner experience of reality and enjoyment. Indian art therefore should bring out the inner experience of man.

As a seer and a poet, Aurobindo brought in a new way of thinking in art through his poetry. His poetic development was to advance his yogic consciousness. Poetry was not just beautiful feelings and words put together but for Aurobindo, it has an ultimate aim for a divine manifestation on earth. He called poetry 'mantra of the real' that could bring out spiritual point of view. His poetry was an endeavor to bring in his poetic life, spiritual experiences and mystic revelations. Aurobindo, through his own experiences and inspirations in poetry created entirely a new kind of spiritual experience. As a poet, he also revealed intuitive inspirations that play a significant role in poetic composition.

Aurobindo, unlike others, did not romanticize poetry but poetry for him was an inner spiritual experience to seize inner truths that can be revealed to people. Thus, poetry was not just an impression of feelings and ordinary talks but it is a heightened expression that needs to be realized. Aurobindo through his poetry became a mediator between God and man. In this way, his poetry calls for spiritual thoughts and truth.

Spiritual Goal: Aurobindo talks about the imperative need of a shift to a real inner person that will open up higher consciousness leading to the divine reality. He laid out a new foundation of spirituality that seeks to realize the divine within. His spiritual evolution opens many-sided basis for the spiritual development of humankind.

The inner experience Aurobindo refers to in his works is not an ordinary spiritual experience itself. Spiritual experience is beyond reason and reason is beyond intellectual speculation. This experience, he calls truth and the truth he says is known by the way of Supermind. Supermind is the highest level in truth consciousness and Aurobindo's ultimate aim was to reach the level of Supermind. His belief that spiritual truth comes through inspiration and not through labor permeates Aurobindo to divinize humankind.

Spirituality is dominant in Indian thought and India's greatness was the spiritual age that sought for an inner experience in man. This search of an inner spiritual experience was a search in every step of Indian culture. Thus, Aurobindo also essentially based his search of the spirit in the light of true appreciation of Indian art in the spirit. This appreciation is an ultimate goal for the attainment of spirituality.

The realization and appreciation of the inner true spirit should be realized as a means to attain inner truths within that could lead to the attainment of the divine. Thus, Aurobindo's philosophy of evolution deals with matter and spirit to realize a spiritual evolution. To him, matter and spirit are two aspects of the same thing. This matter will ascend to the spirit and a corresponding spiritual consciousness will descend to the matter. Thus, a divine realization will descend in to lower forms of consciousness.

Objective of the Study

Aurobindo struggled for liberty of mankind to develop truth and grow in the spirit. Thus, this study attempts to understand his integral vision of the spirit and life. It will look into how his dreams of encompassing many forms is unique in creating a deep understanding and meaning of the self beyond that will create a perfect synthesis of the world and spirit. A formulation of his spiritual vision, foreseeing a complete transformation of man with an understanding of reaching the higher level of consciousness, by which he means integrating spirit and life, will be looked at with an insight into his vision. It also attempts to analyze, examine and understand the standpoint of spirituality in Aurobindo's philosophy. Hence, it has the following objectives i) To explore the different spheres of Aurobindo's philosophy and see how he connects them to spirituality. ii) To study how he aimed to bring change through spiritualizing the material world. iii) To analyze if spiritualizing was able to bring the change that was aimed. iv) To explore if the need of change was able to be brought about by his spiritual concept v) To critically examine Aurobindo's concept of spirituality.

Organization of the Thesis

The thesis unfolds with an introduction to each chapter that explores the central themes, background, research problems and objectives that will be discussed in the chapter.

The first chapter locates Aurobindo within a socio-historical context and elaborately discusses how his spiritual philosophy evolved. It also deals with the aspects of his philosophy that touches upon the topic of spirituality through which he had tried to achieve his aim and goal of liberating his people and leading them towards a divine life. Aurobindo takes an integral view of life and socially and politically wants to integrate the whole through the spirit or a divine life. He does not only try to solve the

problem of the country but has a vision far into the future and offers solution to the problems, which at that point of time was a neglect of political thought. Men are bound to be imperfect, he finds inadequate the political institution, and religious approaches as partial. Therefore, he emphasizes that the transformation of man's nature into divine being would lead to an establishment of a spiritual society that will be ideal for all.

The second chapter deals with the integral *yoga* of Aurobindo. This chapter presents an introduction to his *yoga* and the meaning of his nationalism that defines what he aims to achieve. It also explains what he means by integral *yoga* and how the synthesis of all the other *yogas* can lead to Supermind. Thus, the chapter also explains what he means by superman, who is spiritualized and attains the highest level of consciousness, the Supermind. The idealized and spiritualized society of Aurobindo requires that one should go through the intervening stages of consciousness and soar upwards in reaching the Supermind. At the level of Supermind, man becomes a divine being after reaching the highest level of the spiritual state. The spiritual principle then transforms man and governs the mind. This spiritual principle is of considerable importance in Aurobindo's philosophy because Supermind determines the ultimate nature of man and human society. Once an individual mind is spiritualized, the spiritual development, he believed would transform the society that man's ideal and life are based on the spirituality that can transform. The attainment of Supermind, thus lead towards the realization of the divine. Therefore, to remain focused on his integral *yoga* is an ascent to the Supramental level.

The third chapter deals with the spiritual aesthetic of Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy. Aesthetic for Aurobindo was not just beauty and the beautiful but more than that, it can move our experience to a level of spirituality. Thus, what he seeks in aesthetic is not what makes experience aesthetic experience but how

spiritual experience can be experienced while seeking aesthetic experience. The forerunners of spiritual aesthetics in India are Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy. Therefore, Indian art in general and Indian art according to them has been explored in this chapter, how they both tried to arrive at spiritual aesthetics. Aurobindo's aesthetics is spiritual in its conception because according to him, the spiritual is the highest use of art. Art for art's sake expresses the beautiful in things but he seeks something more than just beautiful. He was in search of in art an experience that can elevate us and move us to the spiritual level. Therefore, art has to be something from the soul that is of highest emotion. To this, he gives poetry the highest place of high emotions. Poetry is not just words put together but it comes from the poet's deepest thoughts and is pure, therefore it comes from the spirit. His aesthetic can be said is thus developed in his epic poem '*Savitri*' that is of mystic experience. Coomaraswamy on the other hand finds meaning to art and its significant form. He also finds the depths of Indian aesthetic to the recognition of a divine reality functioning as the principle. This reality, however, cannot be apprehended through perception, as we perceive art in our everyday life but through the transformation of the intellect. Thus, Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy tries to bring out the spiritual side of Indian aesthetics and regards aesthetic not only to serve the purpose of the beautiful but has a deeper meaning underlying in art that can take and lead us to reaching the divine.

The fourth chapter deals with a critical assessment of Aurobindo's philosophy of spirituality. He devoted his life to concentration on spiritual practices. He did not swerve from the spiritual path until the end of his life. However, it is important to see how he has tried to regenerate the spiritual path in his people. Aurobindo had tried to solve the country's problem not only by understanding what is causing problems among the people but also had a vision of the future. This vision is his vision of spiritualizing everything that could unite one and all by bringing into man a realization of the divine that is within. To achieve his aim of divine life, Aurobindo

had touched upon all spheres of life and seeks to bring out spirituality that is underlying in the Indian spirit, which was the glorious past of India. he was able to stir in the youths, the spirit and the need to fight for their country's freedom. However, to spiritualize all and to bring divine life on earth for a mass divinization is a difficult task, if we look at his aim in every aspect of life and that he was unable to fulfill his aim of spiritualizing. Therefore, the chapter also attempts to make an assessment of Aurobindo's achievement as a spiritual leader and the chapter also tries to understand and explain how although he himself had attained and reached the level of Supermind that was his goal, he was unsuccessful in reaching to the mass a divine realization.

CHAPTER 1

LOCATING AUROBINDO AND HIS CONCEPT OF SPIRITUALITY WITHIN SOCIO-HISTORICAL CONTEXT

1.1 Introduction

Aurobindo is a poet, thinker, mystic and a divine force whose aim is to transform humanity by involving and advocating divinity on earth. This chapter attempts to introduce in parts the political, cultural and philosophical concepts of Aurobindo, which is divided towards his dream of freeing India from the British rule. It will also look at the factors that influenced the culture of India and shaped his philosophy. These influences had led him to spirituality that he later brought out in all aspects of life, seeking divine life on earth. His philosophy of spirituality will be discussed in detail later.

1.2 Historical and Philosophical outline of Aurobindo

Aurobindo is a great spiritual leader who succeeded in controlling and establishing his mind in silence to reach the Divine Life. He is not only concerned about his own spiritual life but aims to achieve spiritual ends for all humankind. With his arrest in 1908, as the prime suspect in Alipore bombing, he was kept in solitary confinement for one year but later released after he was found innocent.

During his time of solitary confinement, he started meditation and not having anything to do had led him to meditate for longer hours. He sees Krishna on the prison wall, which leads him to a deeper meditation and raises his inner spirit higher.

In the agony of solitary confinement, he developed a great spiritual development and learned unique lessons from God. These lessons were to turn his fellow citizens and the world from barbarous ways to a path of humanity and that a spiritual faith and complete surrender would elevate one to become Divine. Thus, after his release his impulse directed him towards freedom movement.

The goal of Sri Aurobindo was to free India from British rule and put a stop to their barbarous rule. He in the beginning had tried to bring freedom working as a political leader force. However, after realizing that freedom could be achieved spiritually, he gave up politics and later worked as a mystic and a spiritual leader.

His arrival to Pondicherry in 1910 with his inner guide to fulfill God's mission that was assigned for him to become a pure Divine instrument to bring about Divine life into earthly life. He tried to achieve his mission through meditation and yoga and abandoned active politics to concentrate upon the spiritual. He thus settled and built his ashram in Pondicherry.

Aurobindo played an important role in the early days of Indian nationalism stirring the youths of Bengal and bringing them together to question the British rule in India. He had a clear vision of Indian political destiny and significantly contributed towards the nationalist movement. His home spiritual odyssey had transformed him. He gave a religious outlook to politics or rather a spiritual goal for the struggle of nationalism.

To make sure that he will not have any exposure to Indian culture and education, he was taken to England at a very young age. However, in college his interest shifted to

Indian freedom from British rule. With his arrival in India in June 1893, began to have spiritual experiences.

Nevertheless, with his return, he had seen foreign domination over Indians. This troubled him much. Thus, he realizes and felt the need that India's freedom is necessary. This is to stop nagging and oppression from British-rulers. On seeing India, being oppressed and starved by the foreign rulers, he felt that it is the duty of the Indians to strive for possible means to liberate the motherland from her shackles and prepare to sacrifice everything into the service of India.

He was convinced that there is a need of spiritual development that should build among the Indians to progress not only materially but to transcend which will allow one to seek and know the truth. He was not only hopeful but also certain that achievement of uniting the world and peace would be brought about by Indian spirituality to create an aspiration in human for peace and unity.

He started with nationalism that lays more emphasis on the aspect of the spiritual evolution of humanity and human unity to achieve peace and unity. The political independence of India is important and this independence would not only mean political necessity but he sought to bring spiritual necessity as well. If this political independence is achieved then it will allow India to take the spiritual lead. This could also give new scope and defend the spiritual culture of India to bring India out of the declining and decadent culture.

In the need of the wake of spirituality in India, there is a meeting of the east and the west in Aurobindo's philosophy. What is required in the west is the acceptance of a spiritual standpoint and in the east, they have spirituality but it is static. The Indian thought must break its wall of Individualism to acquire a cosmic character. Therefore, he merges the two and tries to bring in what is missing in each.

He has another great concern that is the aim of human life on earth. A divine life upon earth can be a new attainment towards a divine self. He considered that it should be possible to transform the whole being into a perfect and conscious soul, manifesting the divine consciousness in the mind, life and body.

His philosophy is in search for a link, connecting a divine consciousness from all beings and in fact, he announces that a perfect and divine life upon earth is gods will in the world. The philosophy of Aurobindo deals with three main problems, the problem of evolution, the problems of yoga and the problem of the nature of reality.

The world at every stage of its process need divine intervention. Evolution, therefore is the ascend of life and mind towards the ultimate reality that leads him to his theory of evolution. The theory of evolution propounded by him is the soul of his philosophy. His whole philosophy moves around it.

1.3 The Evolution Theory

In Aurobindo's evolution theory, there is a descend of the spirit into matter. The lowest is the ordinary mind that should ascend and reach the Supermind. Similarly, the spirit descends down and reaches the mind, where the mind must consequently ascend to something higher i.e. the Supermind.

He has replaced the cosmic view of evolution by a spiritual evolution and the result was a new evolution. Aurobindo sees the whole universe from the standpoint of *Sachidananda*. He bases the source of evolution as being *Sachidananda* itself. Thus, *Sachidananda* is absolute bliss and evolution will not stop until it divinizes the world.

For a realization of what truth is, Aurobindo said, human needs a transition in to the divine. Mind is an ignorance seeking for knowledge expression. Therefore, mind cannot be the last or conscious knowledge that will give us truth. A whole true-knowledge and self-knowledge by which we can realize our true being is only through

the Supramental truth-consciousness. This will allow us to understand our true being to get fulfillment of spiritual evolution.

To reach the Supramental consciousness, Aurobindo developed his evolution theory that is a gradual development of consciousness. This is a distinctive feature of his evolution theory. He presents a metaphysical view of evolution. The evolution theory of Aurobindo is spiritualistic and consciousness is the most important in his concept of evolution. His theory of evolution starts from matter at the bottom and its goal is to reach the highest state of divine life or absolute consciousness.

According to Aurobindo, involution pre-supposes evolution. He believes that there is some involution prior to evolution. The process of involution is descent and evolution is ascent. What is the ultimate in involution is matter. However, evolution process starts with matter appears. Thus, evolution is the inverse action of involution in Aurobindo's words.

In the evolution process, absolute consciousness is the primal existence that will descend down to matter. Matter will then start evolving to reach its ultimate goal again, the absolute consciousness.

Evolution is the method in which one liberates itself and mind reaches the highest level of consciousness. Consciousness will then develop towards greater perfection and reality. The cycle of his evolution will always tend upwards. It will reach Supermind but does not stop there. However, it will again descend down to bring into matter what is in Supermind to create a world proper in each levels of mind (in evolution process). In the stage of ascent, one passes the human mind and there is conversion of mind into a new consciousness that rises beyond the intellect reaching the highest state of mind.

The main thrust of his evolution theory is thus an evolution of the integral character of various levels of mind for its transformation. If only the lower forms of matter and life transforms in to a mind capable of spiritual consciousness, then only the potentiality concealed in lower minds (mind below Supermind level) can be revealed.

The transformation and conversion in his evolution theory is the gradations of mind that will ascend from the lowest to the highest mind, Supermind. The Divine Life that Aurobindo seeks to achieve can be reached and attained only at the Supermind. The Supermind then means the truth-consciousness of Divine life where there is no place of division and ignorance. The divine life upon earth is an ideal that can come about only with a spiritual change and the evolution theory seeks to achieve this nature.

The theory of Aurobindo's evolution, therefore, we can say is the most important in his philosophy. It is the most important because his whole philosophy revolves around his theory that he says should be a spiritual evolution.

To explain the nature of consciousness in his evolution theory, Aurobindo gives five planes of mind. They are i) the Higher mind ii) the Illumined mind iii) the Intuitive mind iv) the Overmind v) the Supermind. These planes of minds are the spiritual consciousness.

In the first plane of higher mind, the mind becomes aware of its own, sees, and knows things with that awareness. Aurobindo however adds that, though it is spiritual in its substance, the mind in this stage is very much on the level of ordinary mind.

As mind ascends to Illumined mind from higher mind, there is a greater force. There is a greater dynamic and it comparatively replaces the slow process of the mind almost for a rapid transformation. This transformation is a transformation of the mind from a spiritual plane to a more spiritual plane.

The next level of mind is the Intuitive mind, which Aurobindo says is the form of reason or intellect in a higher form. It is in intuition that there is a real opening for a realization to go further to the higher level of consciousness in all its possibility

The Overmind is the next and the highest level below Supermind. Aurobindo, however firmly holds that it is not sufficient to transform the unconscious wholly. This is because only the Supramental force is capable of achieving and transforming mind to Supermind. Nevertheless, in the Overmind level, we recognize the original cosmic power that made ignorance possible. In other words, Overmind divides cosmic ignorance from cosmic truth and thus draws a line possible for consciousness-force for a concentration of higher truth.

The next plane of mind is the Supermind. It is the highest level of mind that Aurobindo works to achieve. There is a mind beyond the higher mind, which Aurobindo calls the Supermind. Supermind is the truth inherent in all cosmic force that determines truth of divine consciousness. Supermind is also a link between *Satchidananda* and universe, knowledge and ignorance.

Aurobindo also calls Supermind truth-consciousness. Truth-consciousness is also a subordinate description of Supermind used by Aurobindo since the term may be taken in the sense of a mental mind as such.

The Supermind, we can say in its nature has self-awareness and self-determining power to have divine knowledge. Supermind, thus manifests the play of its form of self-existent knowledge to mind because mind is an ignorance seeking for truth.

If only Supermind (individual consciousness) descends, the perfection dreamed of as the highest in humanity comes. Supermind opens to consciousness other than mind and discovers one's true self, brings down Supramental force and transforms mind,

life and body. His yoga also aims to realize this possibility, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Our mental mind and vital existence can become more powerful, great and perfect if only they are divinized or changes in the divine. For this reason, the Supramentalize mind lowers again into the mental and physical life to transform and spiritualized mind. This is the substance underlying Aurobindo's theory of spiritual evolution.

The rise of a being upon earth, possession of spiritual reality and attaining its domination over the veil of mind and body that covers reality is true knowledge. To be lifted out of physical and mind consciousness into greater power of being to a life of the spirit is the perfect expression of true manifestation. Aurobindo dreams to achieve this in all spheres of human life. The realization of the power of spiritual life is a sense of delight and a force of action that defines Aurobindo's goal of philosophy.

1.4 Aurobindo's Politics

After joining the Baroda state service, he launched a series of articles concerning the deep awareness of Indian history and culture. At Baroda, he also started his political ideas that can serve the cause of his country's freedom. The political thought is also an aspect of his vision, which is an extension of his personal and spiritual development. Thus, his political theory is firmly grounded in his spiritual convictions.

The beginning of his early political thought reveals that he was a critic of congress and a critic of the British. He worked for his positive political program of political action. It is appropriate here to consider and look into some aspects of his political career that will show us how his political thoughts later elaborate and then into spirituality.

1. As a critic of Congress - Aurobindo felt that the congress in proceeding towards their accomplishments is not sincere and whole heartedness. He

believed they do not have a clear idea of freedom and since its inception were able to achieved only few administrative reforms.

2. He felt the timidity of the congress such that there was too much flattery of the British rule since it adopted a wrong approach towards their rule. The congress sought to gain favor of its foreign rulers and feared displeasing the British rulers. They do not rely on the strength of the nation, instead counted on the British rule.
3. He strongly criticized the congress with the charge that, their political development had remained a closed organization and did not enjoy support of the vast Indians.

Thus, his recognition of the necessity and need of converting the national movement into a mass movement led him to his early writings with an awareness of mass awakening in the national movement. He marks a departure with his direct attack upon the British. He sought to show that their political system was not the best because this had led to the cramping of Indian spirit and its development.

Aurobindo's objective to fight against the British rule for complete freedom consisted of his political thought and contribution of spiritual nationalism and a theory of Boycott. The concept of spiritual nationalism is to bring out the deep-rooted spiritual power in man that is present everywhere in human life. He adds that if the spiritual power within the self is realized and transcended, it will bring out the deeper meaning of understanding the truth. The spiritual thought practiced in India would advance the whole of humanity into a spiritual journey and spiritually regenerate the world.

The philosophy of nationalism preached by Aurobindo appealed for nothing less than a free India swept surging through *Bande Mataram*, a journal in which he expressed his political thoughts.

The extensive writings of Aurobindo on the political importance in India have taken a path to making India prepared for the spiritual destination. His spiritual perspective to reconstruct a spiritual India is only a nationalistic goal. However, it can be said that his spiritual perspective is also a religious and a spiritual exercise.

The British rule can be pulled up and substituted by national spirit. This led him to his theory of Boycott and passive resistance.

Boycott in this context was an act to refuse anything that could organize a help and assist the British officials into its administration. His main Boycotting target was British goods, in view of the fact, which he believed that if their economic exploitation stopped then their dominion would collapse. Thus, this was treated as an outstanding and an excellent weapon in making the motherland a spiritual guide to others.

The idea of resistance in the political agenda of Aurobindo is a force used to liberate the motherland, which is an important part of his political technique. This resistance aims to convert the British autocratic bureaucracy into a democratic government of India. This resistance could come about by establishing the basis of free constitution and democracy so that the idea of resistance could look after the general interest of the country and its fellow citizens.

The concept of violence, passive resistance, active resistance represent some of the most important problems of politics and an agreement to these political means could successfully oust political problems. Thus, Aurobindo advocated these three means for the realization of his desired goal to free India. Aurobindo emphasized that for our ends to be great, our means must be as great as our ends. The end can be found by seeking the eternal source of strength in ourselves. That is why he said, the strength should discover our means so as to attain the end. This statement

claims that our end can be attained by seeking a spiritual means that is eternal, which also mean that a great spiritual means can attain a spiritual end.

There was no secret view of Aurobindo that violence can be justified in the struggle of national freedom because non-violence to him is only a means whereas it was an end in itself for Gandhi.

Among the many methods of political manoeuver, he chose passive resistance as the most suited and best method at the juncture to fight against the British-rule. The nation could achieve its liberty with the method of passive resistance.

Passive resistance would abstain the people of the nation from doing something that would help the administration and allow non-representation of oneself from doing any help to the ruling government. As passive resistance progresses and grows, a citizen may take as its duty to disobey the unjust laws and orders that prescribed to them and he often calls this resistance defensive resistance.

According to Aurobindo, the first principle of passive resistance is;

“To make administration under present conditions impossible by an organized refusal to do anything which shall help either British commerce in the exploitation of the country or British officialdom in the administration of it, unless and until the conditions are changed in the manner and to the extent demanded by the people. This attitude is summed up in one word, boycott.” (*Sri Aurobindo, the Doctrine of Passive Resistance, p.21*).

In the wake and need for an expression of passive resistance to adhere to, he demonstrated the need of active resistance too since it is an immediate means of

attaining freedom that could inflict positive harm on the administration. This is aggressive resistance. Whenever, defensive resistance seemed cowardice then the use of aggressive resistance stands mandatory.

The theory of resistance to be effective thus had to obviously deal with some important aspects of the functions of the government. He realized that if help to the government be systematically withdrawn, then the British- rule in India would become impossible.

His resistance tried to make administration under present condition impossible and started important movement such as boycott or *swadeshi*. The boycott of British education and national organizations are few of his movements. The reason behind boycott or *swadeshi* was to make an effort of patriotic love for Indian goods and its worthiness so that they could stop the purchase of British goods which, done at large could blow British power.

1.5 Education

Even though education was in control of the government, it was used by the foreign rulers to instill in them a sense of loyalty to discourage what is national spirit. He also included the boycott of its administration, since it was considered repressive and tyrannous. This is exploiting and reducing the helpless masses to nothing, so his objective against British administration was to reduce them to mere skeleton. If the purpose of these methods could work and develop then the British rule could fall out within no time.

Soon after, he felt the need to substitute British education by national education. Aurobindo realized that one of the important ways by which the British were dominating the Indians was the control of the developing mind through education that did not spring from among the Indians.

He was not against accepting new ideas and advancement in science and technologies brought by the western but the respect and the values he sees in his culture made him feel the need for the people to know its worthiness.

Therefore, a boycott of British education was necessary to be substituted by a “national education” that could take full control of the malleable mindset of the youth. He thus formulated the concept of national education. National schools then started in Bengal.

“He looks up on education as a means for the awakening and developing of man’s spiritual being. Sri Aurobindo’s concern for true knowledge and his endeavor to bring out the exact connotation of education is very much Indian.” (*Understanding thoughts of Sri Aurobindo, edited by Indrani Sayal Krishna Roy, p.101*).

True education will be a means for the working of the spirit in the mind, body of the individual and the nation and aims at preservation, strengthening and enrichment of the nation’s soul and its *svadharma*. In the words of Aurobindo,

“That alone will be a true and living education which helps to bring out to full advantage, makes ready for the full purpose and scope of human life that is in the individual man, and which at the same time helps him to enter into his 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 of nation a living, a separate and yet

inseparable member”. (*Bhagirathi Sahu, The New Educational Philosophy, p. 206*).

Thus, his model of education requires that both parents and teachers should help the child to educate and develop inner capacities. The teachers and parents should also help the child to realize their own potentialities of each child. They should not regard one child as same and a copy of the other, however pay attention to their needs of development of true education.

1.6 National Freedom

One of the greatest achievements of the nationalist party was to bring for the first time before the Indian public the invigorating ideal of complete *swaraj*. Aurobindo’s final goal of liberation is ‘*swaraj*’. For a free India, it must have *swaraj* because according to him, the next stage of human progress is spiritual and not material. India must be free because with her spiritual development, India was destined to lead for the progress of the world and *Swaraj* that will allow the people to live in the light of a spiritual destiny.

The ideal of *swaraj* is that of absolute autonomy free from foreign control. We claim the right of every nation to live its own life by its own energies according to its own nature and ideals. We reject the claims of aliens to force upon us a civilization inferior to our own or to keep us out of our inheritance on the untenable ground of a superior fitness.

In order, to achieve freedom of the country, the main stress is to put on the political freedom of the country almost to exclude others for the need of the nation. Thus, Indians should not live as slaves but as free people to work for the spiritual and intellectual benefit of other people.

His contribution of spiritual politics to modern Indian political thought is unique. He has also inspired the youth of his time to work for the cause of national freedom and has lifted the economic and political context to a new kind of spiritualism.

Aurobindo first emphasized on the need of all sections of society to participate in the national movement. He created a renewed confidence among the people and a favorable atmosphere for revolutionary spirit among the political activists.

Aurobindo does not dismiss the contributions that the west has made to human progress. However, it is without any doubt that he would argue, it is the spiritual traditions of India that, can grasp the unity of all humankind with knowledge of universal Divine Consciousness. This is because the spirit of Indian culture, its ideas and best ideals have message for humanity and not for India alone.

The principle tenet is that India has been one of the greatest civilizations of the world. India, rather its material culture, the whole foundation stands apart from all others and based on spirituality. Thus, its survival depend the future of human race. India need not seek this from outside because its urge is towards the eternal and since that is always the highest, the entirely real still contains in her own culture and her own philosophy is a reconciliation of the eternal.

Aurobindo in trying to achieve his goal had tried at length to bring out what is causing problem among Indians both externally and internally. As a visionary, he does not only have a vision of complete freedom but also a future with spiritual destiny of the nation. His vision thus extended to the far spiritual destiny of India.

In his view, spirituality is to be brought and expressed through life precisely. However, India's past, despite professing the same spirituality, hardly expressed itself to transform life. That is a great vision to bring an ultimate possibility of Divine life on

earth. To understand his culminating vision, we will look at Aurobindo on the following aspects.

1. Aurobindo on Indian Culture
2. Aurobindo on Indian spirituality
3. Aurobindo and Mirra Richards (The Mother)

1.7. Aurobindo on Indian Culture

With regard to civilization of Indian culture, Aurobindo emphasizes the proper appreciation of his own culture and to take pride in own spirit. There is a need to reduce the depreciation of Indian minds they had, due to the impact of others and to awakened in them the glory of its own civilization. The revival of a national spirit will succeed in giving the message of hope and freedom to the people.

In his view, India is one of the greatest of world's civilizations because of its high spiritual aim, the effective manner in which it impressed the aims or forms of the rhythms of its life. The culture of the country plays a very important role in shaping the understanding of the people. Thus, according to Aurobindo, when the spirit of old Indian spiritual culture is made known and realized this understanding can also be achieved and understood by his people.

Culture takes into account the aesthetic values and spiritual impulse and social aspects of human beings living in the society. It describes the belief, practices and the totality of a person's learned experience, which passes on from generation to generation and is expressed through art, religion, music, traditions and various behavioral acts of individuals in the society.

Culture changes with response to the changing conditions of the physical world and is characterized by continuity, which comes from the past and moves forward to shape the future.

To Aurobindo,

“The culture of a people may be roughly described as the expression of a consciousness of life which formulates itself in three aspects. There is a side of thought, of ideal, of upward will and the soul’s aspiration; there is a side of creative self-expression and appreciative aesthesis, intelligence and imagination, and there is a side of practical and outward formulations.” (*Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, p.59*).

He projects Indian culture more as an advocate that tend towards spirituality and inner development as different and distinct from that towards materiality and external achievement. All the cultural character and main ideas are derived from the spirit.

“Together they make up its soul, mind and body.” (*Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, p.59*).

Aurobindo gave India’s cultural history to us in a more enlightened manner. It is more enlightened in the sense that it does not only consider the culture of India. However, it focuses more on the spiritual glory of India, which was its past spiritual culture that has lost with time and external forces of foreign rulers. He sees that India is about to be forced into a transformation with the criticisms of foreigners against Indian culture and there is a fear that western culture may put an end to the spiritual culture of India.

Here, it will be adequate to examine, what is India and Indians according to him? To this question, he answers that India is not just a piece of land with millions of people living but it the mother to many Indians with a spiritual past. If India is a land of spirit, then Indians will be spirituals living in the land.

However, his definition of India and Indians are not satisfactory because it is not only India but other nations that are also spiritual. Thus, the people of that nation also becomes spiritual and same as Indians are. Therefore, it is problematic to understand how they are more spiritual than others are. In connection to this problem, it is not clear as to which historical timeframe he is referring to when he talks about revival. If he was referring to the time when India was under the British-rule, then India stood in need of a more political reform than the need of spirituality. Nevertheless, he used spiritual means to achieve freedom of India, which he fails to fully achieve his dream that will be discussed in the following chapter.

Where changes occur and when there is force coming upon the people, India have to defend itself by reshaping her culture to express more powerfully and perfectly its ancient goals. It also can be said that conflict appears in the process of trying to get victory over other cultures. At such times it is important to see what can Indian draw from its culture offer or stand in defend of its changing culture.

Indian culture has molded itself in times of change and now in the present modern era, there is cultural and religious diversity, which as a result there is a rich contribution of diverse culture in the country. A region, languages, festivals, cultural policy, literature, music and many more influences the diverse culture.

However, it is not mentioned whether Aurobindo had celebrated the cultural diversity of India. If he does not celebrate, then that would mean that the culture he is talking about is one sided and does not include the various diverse cultures. The spiritual culture of India that he wants to revive from the old spiritual culture of India, thus, explains that he is in favor of Hindu culture than a liberal culture.

Cultural variety has also increased with the intermingling among various social groups. Indian culture has kept on changing; however, the important feature that marked this culture is that, the basic spirit of the culture continued.

There is the question of how Indian culture continued to exist amidst changes. The process of continuity and change has always been a dynamic feature of Indian culture. Many cultures have developed but many have perished and transformed by another.

Aurobindo has worked for the development of Indian culture through spirituality because he believed that no real development in India is possible on any other foundation other than spirituality, which is a supreme gift to India and India to present it to the west.

He unfolded the essence of Indian culture up to religion, literature, social, political and cultural history to bring about a reflection of what Indian culture has in its tree. India has remained faithful to its spiritual culture, through which the spiritual motive had survived.

Aurobindo in his later part of the book “The Foundations of Indian Culture” gave a value in defense of the development of Indian religion, art, literature and polity.

1.7.1 A Defense of Indian Culture

1.7.1.1 Religion and Spirituality: There is a root of difference between Indian and European culture. The cultural difference springs from Indian civilization with an aim of spiritualizing. This aim imposes all forms and rhythms that have a unique character to India.

A firm spiritual order is a necessity perceived for the spiritual freedom of India. Even in the days of decline, then India because of its spiritual freedom could claim authority of spiritual experiences. They can save the perception that spiritual knowledge is the variety of Indian culture.

An Absolute Supreme, a one Eternal, is beyond life, mind and matter. There is an existence of spirit and an Absolute supreme, the one Eternal supporting all

that is in the world and is self-containing. This is why Indian culture recognizes spirit as truth and life as a growth of spirit evolving.

Indian culture closely associates itself with spirituality as an essence of a person as its most important and prominent feature in defining spirituality as an end. Thus, the purpose of human life is the realization of union of the Self with the Divine, which is the ultimate goal to attain truth for oneself. This is a thought that all major schools of Indian philosophy suggests for the purpose of human life. Sri Aurobindo also in defense and as his goal tries to achieve the Divine life.

1.7.1.2 Indian Art: The highest importance and demand of culture is the aesthetic side of people and its culture. As much as there is appreciation of philosophy, religion and central ideas that forms the foundation of Indian culture, aesthetic expression forms a significant expression of Indian art, culture and thought.

The characteristic method of an Indian artist is to see first in oneself the spiritual being that must be able to create and express the truth of things. Indian art is a spiritual art that should be seen with a spiritual eye. Thus, through that spiritual eye, one would appeal not to an outward excitement but to the inner self and soul of art. This spiritual eye will also allow them to see the spirit underlying in Indian art and not just its beauty.

There is a deep expression of the spirit and its form in Indian culture in three great arts that appealed to us through the eyes of the spirit of Indian culture. They are architecture, sculpture and painting as described in the following.

i) Architecture: the Indian art carries in it the living presence of self and spirit. Therefore, it is essential to look at art solely not just with the physical eye but to make a seeing passage that could open the inner spiritual eye that can make a communion with the soul. Indian architecture demands and tries to bring this kind of spiritual self-identification, bringing out the deepest meaning of art otherwise they will not reveal itself to us. E.g., the God of *Hari-Hara* (half Shiva – half Vishnu) of Gupta period was marked by spiritual quality, which tried to record life of deep spiritual truths. The *Vithali* temple at Hampi in Karnataka of the Vijayanagar empire is another important architecture.

ii) Sculpture: as we appreciate the profound greatness of spirit suggesting in architecture, we shall also find in sculptural art a profound intention of a great spirit of the artistic past of India. The greatness in Indian sculpture lies in the close connection of religion and aesthetic mind of people. The spirit of beauty is expressed in moulded form, which forms the thing yielding the spirit underlying in the sculpture.

The Indian sculpture springs from spiritual realization and in expressing the spirit in form gives potent delight of spirit in creation. The spiritual idea and embodiments of spiritual powers are significant in the gods of Indian sculpture.

Every expression in the sculpture has imbued the inner meaning that would suppress the merely vital or physical outward figure of creation. It is not the ideal emotional beauty that the sculpture seeks but the aim is a kind of creation with spiritual beauty.

Therefore, we have to bring in a different capacity of mind and vision to see deeper and understand the inner meaning than the outwardly art. This is because the inner significance of its religious past lies in the hope of the future a continuity of ancient spiritual endeavor. *Qutub Minar* is a famous sculpture of Indian History. The wall carvings of sun temple of 13th century *Konark*, Orissa is also known for its famous sculpture.

iii) Painting: an important significance that emerges in all Indian art is the oneness of the essential spirit and tradition. The unity and continuity of Indian art enables us to understand and distinguish the essential aim of spiritual method, which defines the Indian paintings different from others.

The motive of Indian painting is identical with the vision of Indian architecture and sculpture. The greatness of a painter lies in the appeal they can put into painting; a vivid outward beauty with a revelation of spiritual emotion of the deepest and finest expression of their significances of things.

The art a painter presents justifies the sense for a search of delight with a pure intensity giving the meaning of universal beauty that is either revealed or hidden in the creation. The inspiration of an artist impose greater aim of enlightenment in the being that could be brought through spiritual aesthetic. The soul and the sense therefore are in harmony in the deepest and finest richness. The expression of the inner significance of things and life are united in the harmony of sense and soul.

Ajanta cave and *Ellora* cave paintings are well known and famous. *Ajanta* cave paintings mainly focus on life and teachings of Buddha back in the

period of Mahayana sect of Buddhism. *Ellora* cave paintings are found in five caves in two series. The first one revolves around Lord Vishnu and Goddess Lakshmi. The second revolves around *Shaiva* holy man and *Apsaras* etc found in Aurangabad.

Aurobindo is therefore trying to focus on Indian art through these three expressions of art, looking at its foundations in Indian spirituality and its expression of the Divine. They also marked the rich traditions and culture of India that distinguishes them. Aurobindo wants to revive this culture of its rich spiritual and traditional past of India that will allow India to live in its glorious past again.

- a) Indian Literature: The greatness of a literature lies in the greatness and worth of its substance, the value of its thought and the beauty of its forms. It is also the degree to which it satisfies the highest conditions of the art of speech.

The unique culture and civilization of India is represented by its ancient Indian literature that is a product of her genius namely, the Vedas, the Upanishads and the two epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata. Of these four texts, the Vedas and the Upanishads are the foundations of their religious and spiritual being.

The Vedas is thus a scriptural spiritual literature of ancient India expressing revelation and knowledge of Indian spirit.

The Upanishads expresses the highest spiritual knowledge that has always been the supreme idea of Indian culture.

The two great epics of Ramayana and Mahabharata gathered in its vastness the poetic activity of Indian minds. These two poems unlike other epics are entirely different in their principles and wrote poetic stories enriched that focused on god's power to create an ideal for people to follow. The Mahabharata thus forms an epic of the soul of religion, social and cultural life of India. The Ramayana gives a finer glow of poetic warmth having profound impact on art and culture in India.

Aurobindo is trying to show that a dominant note in the mind of Indians is spiritual, intuitive and psychic and has been the foundation of all its culture. To be more precise, he is trying to show that the spiritual substance of the sacred literature has immense impact and influence in developing the Indian spirituality and culture.

- b) Indian Polity: A true sense of progress must constitute sound political, social life and economic that could enable people to move and grow towards responsiveness of a collective perfection for advancement in expression of the mind and spirit outwardly.

Culture should serve these ends for a claim that is complete and have integral value because the value of a culture lies in the power that can raise the mind, soul and spirit of complete soundness to advance towards great ideals.

The Indian polity can be realized and understood when it is not considered a separate thing but as part of our social existence with its relation to our everyday life. The ascent of man from ignorant nature to a spiritual existence is the idea that governed the social and cultural ideals of Indians. They had never forgotten this idea even under an exigency of political construction.

The incompetence of Indian politics arisen with a false view of the knowledge of ancient past and historical developments. Aurobindo criticized historians and foreign indologists for reconstructing the history of India from a point of view of the Europeans. That is why their work lacks spirit and true culture of India. if Indians are not able to embody the ancient values in their politics, governance, the, 'outsiders' cannot be entirely blamed for misrepresenting India since they write what they saw or heard. In other words, Indian politics went wrong for lack of knowledge of ancient past.

This is a point Aurobindo is trying to bridge in politics. What was lacking in Indian politics, he believed was a lack of ancient knowledge and he in trying to revive the ancient past brought spirituality in to politics. This point raises the interesting issues of whether there was a lack of Indian historians, cultural critics and prophets or religious scholars to critic the misinterpretation and the rulers. This shows that the Indians under the British-rule accepted whatever was formed to rule over them.

Like many other nationalists, Aurobindo had attempted to awaken the spirit of nationalism in his people. He had made conscious effort in making people understand the distinguishing features of Indian culture and its civilization, which will not only create their identity and a sense of pride but could also reply the western interpretation of Indian history.

The propensity to seek the spirit and a true inner being is the basis of Indian mind. Therefore, he discussed the differences of Indian polity from the western political tradition. The governing structure was set in a historical context in the development of Indian polity.

1.8. Aurobindo on Indian Spirituality

What does Aurobindo mean by Indian spirituality and what makes India more spiritual? By spirituality, he means that a spiritual change must turn a man's ignorance into knowledge and by a change one can live a harmonious life when *swaraj* is achieved. Aurobindo's spirituality is epistemic in nature. Nevertheless, knowledge does not necessarily lead to action, knowledge or morality because it does not entail ought. Therefore, to bridge the gap that spirituality is attained from individual's knowledge as he poses is a problem. The question to whether his theory of revival works through knowledge is an issue that will be discussed in the next chapter.

Aurobindo thinks religion cannot build a society and cannot remove the cause of destruction and it is his cherished dreams that our culture be ruled by dharma (duty) or *moksa* (liberation) for a better future.

Aurobindo does not equate religion to spirituality unlike Radhakrishnan and makes a considerable distinction between the two.

According to Radhakrishnan, religion helps us to increase the feeling of morality and love; helps change our personal lives. Religion also helps in diminishing the hateful feelings and bridges God and man uniting them. Thus, according to Radhakrishnan, true religion creates a feeling for the likeness of spirituality or divinity.

However, Aurobindo differs from his view of religion and says religion can never be an effective means for a society's advancement because it tends to become confused with the particular creeds of several religious sects and leads to spread of intolerance and hatred.

Therefore, according to him, only true religion is equal to spirituality. What then is true religion? True religion is that whose roots lies within spirituality, not in religious creeds of distinct religious sects but rather an admixture of all of them.

How does Aurobindo then represent spirituality? He said the main object of spirituality is to experience the delight of existence and shows a different path of enjoying and deriving pleasure that of divine experience.

He was of the opinion that if a person discovers his true self; the power of divinity lying within it brings about a rise in his level of consciousness. This enables him to rise above his ego, which often tends to hinder his progress.

Ignorance is thus replaced by knowledge, which paves way for the success of a person, realizes the spiritual transformation, and brings down the divine nature and a divine life into the mental, vital, physical nature and life of humanity. For him divine truth is greater than any religion or creed scripture or idea or philosophy.

If divine is everywhere, then there certainly is in man also, may be a partially concealed spirit but through spiritual disciplines, one is able to uncover this spirit, which is hidden by our ego. What is new in him is the firm conviction that a new spiritual discipline is necessary to achieve the next stage of spiritual evolution of humanity. This spiritual evolution will bring a change in spiritual transformation of which he said,

“The spiritual change is the established descent of the peace, light, knowledge, power, bliss from above, the awareness of the Self and Divine and of a higher cosmic consciousness and the change of the whole consciousness to that”. (*Aurobindo, The Integral Yoga, Sri Aurobindo's teaching and Method of Practice, p.209*).

The Indian conception of life starts from a deeper center and moves on less external lines to a very different objective. The peculiarity of the Indian eye of thought is that it looks through the form, looks even through the force, and searches for the spirit in

things everywhere. Their idea of the world, of Nature and existence is not physical, but psychological and spiritual.

Man born of matter is eternally subject to physical nature but a spirit that uses life and body. Man is an understanding faith of existence, an attempt to live it out. Man is the science and practice of this high endeavor and the aspiration to break out in the end from this mind bound to life and matter into a greater spiritual consciousness that is the innermost sense of Indian culture. This constitutes the much talked of Indian spirituality.

1.8.1. Path of Indian Spirituality

It is also important to know what according to Aurobindo is spiritual and what is not spiritual? He will call an ordinary life and a religious life not spiritual. Ordinary life is that of an average human life, which separates him from his true self-led by common habits of the mind, life and body, which are the laws of ignorance.

Religious life is trying to turn away from the earth towards the divine. Religious life claims to have found a way out of the bonds of earth's consciousness into beauty beyond yet without knowledge he said is led by the rules of some sects or creed. According to Aurobindo,

“Religious life may be the first approach to the spiritual but it is only a turning point in a round of rites, ceremonies and practices or set ideas and forms without any issue. The spiritual life however proceeds directly by a change of consciousness, a change from the ordinary consciousness, ignorant and separated from its own true self and from God, to a greater consciousness. India is one nation, which is able to preserve its spiritual

purity and never surrender it to any opposing forces. Sri Aurobindo even dreamt India to be the spiritual guide of other nations.” (*Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Yoga, Religion, Morality, Idealism and Yoga. Vol 1, p. 137*).

1.8.2. Spiritual Nationalism:

However, his political thought raises the question of whether his theory of nationalism was spiritual. In what sense is his nationalism spiritual and what kind of spirituality is he talking about? It is argued that his nationalism in reality was religious and spiritual, an appeal to turn the whole of India to Hinduism. Critics have further argued that to regard nationalism as an instrument of spiritual perfection is too idealistic and visionary for the common people.

In a multi-cultural society like India, it will not be ideal to associate religion with politics. Though spirituality defines India and its past as a spiritual glory, the spirituality in India is again as diverse as its culture. A spiritual or a religious connection to politics may increase strife between religious communities in a pious India. Therefore, what may seem a political agenda may become a multi-role for religion.

His politics in its totality has spirituality all over, as politics for him was a broader aspect of spiritual development. There is spirituality and Aurobindo wants to attain a spiritual development in politics too. We can say, therefore politics for him is located at the periphery of spiritual development. He believed India could rise to the level of spiritual guide only through the teachings of the Hindu religion. Thus, it could mean that what he is calling a spiritual development and a spiritual nationalism would mean a Hindu religious propaganda.

He was criticized further more for not paying attention to social reform, which were more important. However, the defense radicals regarded that he gave more preference and importance to the circumstances that was existing at that time. In regard to this view, he stated that the life breadth of the nation is an educational and social reform, a moral improvement of the race but at the foremost is political freedom, which was the most important during that point of time.

The key role of the radicals was to transform the national movement from a narrow intellectual pastime of the English-educated intelligentsia into a broad mass movement. Nationalism depends on the awakening and organizing of the whole strength of the nation for its success.

In *Bande Mataram* he wrote,

“It is vitally important for nationalism that the politically backward classes should be awakened and brought back into the current of political life; the great mass of Orthodox Hindus which was hardly ever touched by the old congress movement, the great slumbering mass of Islam which has remained politically inert, the shopkeepers, the immense body of illiterate and ignorant peasantry, even the wild tribes and races still outside the pale of Hindu civilization. Nationalism can afford to neglect and omit none.” (*Adi H.Doctor, Political thinkers of modern India.p.98*)

1.8.3. Aurobindo and James Cousins

Mr. James. H. Cousins in his book “The Renaissance in India”, questions whether there is really Renaissance in India. He also questions whether at all the word

Renaissance applies because he felt India is always awakened and stands in no need of reawakening.

Cousins maintains that the spirituality of India had always saved India from external forces in all critical moments because he has his eye fixed on the spiritual side and spirituality of India. This is the reason why Aurobindo says that Cousin was able to understand and grasp Indian culture in its true nature.

Cousins appeared to be a visionary to Aurobindo. Hence, they both ended on the same note that the renaissance work in India must be a dominant power of the spirit in India to dominate the world. When only a greater spirit dominates life on earth and prevails then we can talk of renaissance in India.

The renaissance in India aimed at a recovery of the old spiritual glory of India that contained in the sacred scripture.

Attempts were made to deal with problems that are modern in the inspiration of regenerated Indian spirit to bring about a realization for a better social and political existence. He calls for a thorough reappraisal and regeneration of Indian culture when he calls for renaissance and compared the Indian renaissance to the Celtic renaissance where Ireland wanted to go back to its old culture after British domination over them for a long period.

Aurobindo had a more profane reason when he takes as his political goal a complete freedom. He had his spiritual idealism, a desire and a dream to see India taking the lead in spiritualizing the world. However, complete freedom of his people is an end goal and he did not seek to spiritualize politics when he first started. In trying to achieve his goal of politics, he realized political freedom can be achieved through spirituality in politics as well.

As had been mentioning above, the concept of freedom to him is his conviction that no real development is possible in India unless it could be set free from foreign oppressions. Political freedom, in other words is an absolute necessary thing that could allow progressing all other things in India.

1.9. Aurobindo and Mirra Richards (The Mother)

Mirra Richards, a French spiritual lady at an early age realizes her spiritual nature and was in pursuit of it. Many spiritual teachers would visit and guide her, when her body falls into trance and among them were one Asiatic figure whom she calls it Krishna.

The one aim of hers is to discover the Divine inside and surrender herself to it. So she also dreamt of creating a place where she could provide to the seekers of Divine material necessities and they could also seek for the one aim she found that is worth finding in them.

Mirra Richards, the spiritual lady had come to India and met Sri Aurobindo. She knew at the first sight that he was the man, the spiritual man Krishna, whom she sees in her meditations and in him lays great treasures of yogic wisdom that should be given to the world.

Mirra Richards had left for Paris after the first-world war. However, after her return to India, she started organizing the ashram effectively from 1920. In 1926, she became the mother of the Ashram and took care of everything after which Aurobindo went into seclusion for meditation.

Aurobindo and the Mother had the same dream to bring about Divine life on earth. Since man is not the last term of evolution on earth but to transcend to the higher level of becoming a superman, he and mother have come together to direct man's transition to superman.

“Mother says she does not represent a philosophy, a religion or a sect. she says she is a force of action, a creative force that can new-create. When it was considered by some people that Sri Aurobindo’s philosophy could be made the basis for founding a new religion, she declared that she would be the very first person to quit the Ashram if such a thing were done.”
(The mother’s service society, Life and teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother. Undated).

It is not enough only to convert human life into divine but a change in basic consciousness to a higher consciousness is needed and this, Mother calls transformation. The ego should be replaced by the soul and the excitement of vital physical happiness by the delight of the spirit. Then there could be transformation of human life into the Divine. All expressions that expresses darkness need to be also replaced by light and truth.

Though the ultimate aim of Aurobindo and the Mother is to reach the Divine, they influence people in different ways. His work influenced and had more impact on people through politics, yoga and meditation, whereas the Mother is through prayer.

People accept mother in several ways and levels of their faith. She is accepted as Divine and people occasionally pray to her only for spiritual progress, while there are others who would do something because Mother has approved and there are others who would like to live their lives only relying on her.

There is another classification of how people relate to mother such as sadhaks, devotees, visitors and others in a slightly different fashion. They accept mother as one to whom to run in crisis, that is to accept mother as their savior. They accept her as

one to whom they would pray, this is to accept mother's divinity as one of the several gods to whom we pray. We can accept mother as one who can give us anything we pray for, if our prayer is a right one.

Thus, prayer means a human soul seeking relationship and turning towards the divine and a soul seeking an eternal relationship with the Divine soul. Therefore, the mother is a divinity and gives you spiritual experiences and when you lose them, she helps you regain it.

The mother was not an aspiring *sadhak* seeking spiritual realization but a Divine Being presiding over the destiny of man and the one aim of her in life is to discover the Divine inside and surrender to it. Thus, she says she is a creative force to expedite evolution on earth and does not represent a teaching.

Aurobindo and Mirra Richards, the Mother had the same vision developed with spiritual experience as its foundation. She and Aurobindo have a different style of teaching but are complementary to each other. Their vision in trying to help man realize the spirit in them, which could make them spiritual and lead to a divine life sought for a place that will help them achieve their dream.

On Sri Aurobindo withdrawing into complete silence and meditation, it was then mother's dream to bring about a place on earth to seek divine where she tried to create the ashram such a place. Therefore, the ashram was founded on the belief that it will awaken soul to accomplish in a short time, attain divine life that will fulfill the earth, which will otherwise take centuries.

As Aurobindo sees, spirituality is everything in man; mother also says all life is spiritual. Therefore, whatever is done in the spiritual atmosphere of the ashram should lead one to a spiritual progress. She intends in 'Auroville', man to find oneself and

shape in the image of the divine for a transformation of human nature to divine nature. If the divine nature is realized then life on earth would turn into divine.

Mother does not make a distinction of ordinary and spiritual life. According to her, it is a less conscious and a more conscious life. So, in the sphere of education, when man learns to become more conscious in one's ordinary life then they become spiritual that leads to a spiritual life.

Like Aurobindo, mother said, India will become the spiritual Guru of the world. Each nation is endowed with a special attribute of its own where India is known for spirituality.

She also joined Aurobindo with a hope to work for the divinization of life on earth. They both focus on India taking the spiritual lead of the world and the world must come to accept spiritual India.

To convert human life on earth into a divine life is what the mother calls transformation. A change or transformation is possible only with the divine and not man. Therefore, to mother all that is asked from a man to achieve this miracle is surrender.

The mother helps the *sadhaks* and disciples in the ashram to instill in them that a total surrender could help them achieve their spiritual dream otherwise which it is a long process of trying. The ashram creates to open human soul by a spiritual realization to the divine reality and she sought to kindle light in the heart of every living being.

The mother was also concern about Western culture and western dominance in India. She said western dominance had spoilt India wherever Indians had inherited western culture. Therefore, when there is a need to regain spiritual experiences, she helps you regain the lost spirit in you and pays attention to the requirements of others.

The mother is not only concerned about the spiritual life of Indians but for everyone on earth. She held herself responsible not only for human beings but for all life on earth, animals and plants and trees as well. Therefore, she emanates her love and grace to all to bring about peace. To have this peace is to have divine life on earth that the mother and Aurobindo joined hands to work. What is their contribution of spirituality to Indians or largely to the world as spiritual figures and leaders is a question of regard, which will be considered later in the following chapters.

1.10. Summary

Let us consider if with modernization creeping in, is it possible to say Indian still holds the same and being capable of defending its culture against the modern culture? Here question can be posing as to what kind of a culture are Indian and non-Indian. At such times, we should not be deterred but our sense of the great past of India should be an inspiration to renew greater achievements.

Nevertheless, as mentioned above, there have been influences on Indian culture resulting in change. Some significant influences on our culture are westernization, popular culture, cultural diversity and globalization.

Diversity in culture allows a better understanding of other cultures, values, ideas and society. They are not ignored but rather maintained which in turn the other gets to adopt some of its ideas or beliefs and culture becomes mixed where one's cultural originality is retained but continues with a mix of other culture. Hence, cultural diversity, also constituted as one of India's culture, does have an effect upon bringing changes.

The products of popular culture such as mass media, radio, television and films have tremendous impact on Indian culture. Globalization has also brought about in much

exposure that has a huge impact in the social, economic, cultural and political ways of India and again westernization has another impact on its tradition.

Western culture is founding its place in India, which is slowly eliminating some of its culture. Thus, a fear has developed amongst the people that westernization is leading to some decline in its culture. Western dressing, food, styles and languages simply shows us the result leading to changes. If we look at the present state, we will find westernization has made a place in everything.

There is still culture, tradition, religion and many still that is followed in the present. However, as compared to the olden times a big amount has fallen, e.g. cinema-the concept in Indian cinema has totally changed, food and clothing, new fashion bases on western style clothing and foreign brands.

Western food has come into style, as a new culture for Indians and we cannot assume towards summit light there must be added a vast horizontal expansion of the consciousness into total homogeneous Indian culture.

Therefore, what Aurobindo has called Indian culture would remain a vision or it is so that he is representing only one particular group of India. In order to fulfill his vision and to represent what India is, one needs to know what underlies the Indian culture and what makes a difference from that of other culture.

As mentioned above, the spirituality of Indian culture has a dominant and a significant role to present itself to the west to bring peace upon the nation and it is the duty of every Indian to find the truth. Nevertheless, how the distinguishing spiritual culture of India can surprise the rest and represent itself is an ideal question that will be discussed later in the last chapter.

CHAPTER 2

AUROBINDO'S INTEGRAL *YOGA*

2.1 Introduction

Aurobindo in his political career had awakened the country to the need for independence. He got in to active politics to bring out his people from foreign rule and tried to solve the problem of nationalism. On landing upon India, he thoroughly enjoyed the spiritual experiences he was experiencing in his motherland, though the familiarity with the life in his country was minimal. At this very beginning, seeing the revolution the country needs and rethinking everything at all stage, he went on to extend significant importance to social-political and spiritual awakening, maintaining the believe that it should be intelligible to awaken the two. For a spiritual awakening in the country, he started his integral *yoga*. In this chapter, we will look at how he moved from nationalism to developing his *yoga* and the aim of his *yoga*.

2.2 What is *Yoga*?

The term “*yoga*” is derived from the root “*Yuj*” which means to “unite”. Thus, the etymological meaning of the word is “union”. Moreover, this union is of man with God or of the individual with the supreme. Hence, it is a conscious union.

Writing in 1905, Aurobindo explained about his inner life in terms of “three madnesses”:

“Firstly, it is my firm faith that whatever virtue, talent, the higher education and knowledge, and the wealth, which, God has given me belong to Him...”

“The second folly has recently taken hold of me; it is this: by whatever means I must get the direct realization of the Lord. The religion of today consists in repeating the name of God every now and then in praying to him in the presence of everybody and in showing to people, how religious one is; I do not want it. If the Divine is there, then there must be a way of explaining His existence, of realizing His presence. However hard the path, I have taken a firm resolution to follow it...”

“The third folly is this: whereas others regard the country as an inert object, and know it as the plains, the fields, the forests, the mountains, and rivers, I look upon my country as the Mother...I know I have the strength to up-lift this fallen race.... This is not a new feeling within me, it is not of a recent origin, I was born with it, it is in my very marrow and God sent me to the earth to accomplish this great mission”. (*The Life of Sri Aurobindo, Purani, p.88-89*).

After withdrawing himself from active politics in 1910, he developed and got into practicing meditation known as *Integral Yoga*. The attainment of spirituality became an alternative to solve the country's problems. He started with meditation where the mind can reach greater heights and thus will soar to become the Divine.

It can be said now that his nationalism took a full and proper shape since what he is trying to establish is a divine attainment not for an individual but for the entire

humanity. The realization of the divine can be reached with a controlled and concentrated mind. It now led him to *yoga* and he developed his *yoga* called *Integral Yoga*.

The attainment of moksha is the aim of *yoga*. However, his *yoga* does not seek to release the soul into moksha but works towards body, vital and mind to purification such that the higher spiritual force would descend into man, transforming man into the Divine and create the next level, the Supramental man. In other words, it works towards transforming human life into Divine, liberating the soul from ego and desire.

2.3 Meaning and Definition of Nationalism

Nationalism can be described as devotion and loyalty towards one's homeland. Nationalism stands beyond the interests of individuals or interests of groups. It also often (but not necessarily) associates with a strong belief in greatness of one's nation over rest of the nations or in other words a nation believing that one's nation is better and greater than the other. It is partly due to one's faith in one's own cultural and belief systems.

However, though nationalism stands above individuals and groups interests, individual and group in one way or the other is expected to contribute to the solidarity of the nation. Here, the individual also acts towards building its nation. It regards that the concept of nationalism takes the frontline, whenever there is a need, in order to achieve unity among the people of the nation. The independence movement is one such incident to describe the spirit of nationalism. Nationalism also arouses in one the need of the spirit to hold the country's greatness and promote its tradition, culture and ways of life in order to justify that one's nation is better than the others.

2.3.1 Aurobindo's Concept of Nationalism

Aurobindo had started his *Integral yoga* to achieve spiritual goals but it is important to discuss again here his concept of nationalism in detail to see how he moved on from politics to spirituality. He was proclaimed a nationalist and he promoted nationalism since he saw the need of it. His nationalism can be understood in his lines where he says,

“Political freedom is the life breath of a nation; to attempt social reform, educational reform, industrial expansion and the moral improvement of the race without aiming first and foremost at political freedom, is the very height of ignorance and futility.” (*Poddar Chandra, Mona Sarkar, Bob Zwicker, Sri Aurobindo and the Freedom of India, p.39*).

Aurobindo explains why an attempt in freeing the country from external forces or foreign shackles can be foredoomed to failure and disappointments without political freedom. He says, we then choose to attribute the failures to defects in the national character without understanding that the first elementary condition of success is national freedom and the nation is not at fault. A healthy national thought is the requisite for national reform and national progress. In his strife to achieve national freedom, Aurobindo in one of his speeches expressed the meaning of nationalism according to him.

“What is nationalism? Nationalism is not a mere political program; nationalism is a religion that has come from God; nationalism is a creed, which you will have to live. If you are going to be a nationalist, if you

are going to ascent to this religion of nationalism, you must do it in the religious spirit. You must remember that you are the instruments of God.” (*Chanda Poddar, Mona Sarkar and Bob Zwicker, Sri Aurobindo and The Freedom of India, p.19.*).

Aurobindo envisions complete independence and tries to awaken in the hearts of his compatriots the grave necessity to free the country. He was successful in instilling in the hearts of the youth and hoped that a national political movement could put a stop to British rule and their barbarous ways to liberate his motherland as we can see in his lines where he said,

“I entered into political action and continued it from 1903 to 1910 with one aim and one alone, to get into the mind of the people a settled will for freedom and the necessity of a struggle to achieve it in place of the futile ambling Congress methods till then in vogue”. (*Verma, K.D. The Indian Imagination, Critical Essays on Indian Writing in English, p.227*).

After reaching out to the youths, Aurobindo with his power of writing and filled with patriotism, he undertook to edit the “*Bande Mataram*” paper and strikes like thunder for liberating his motherland. He worships his country as the mother and radiates the country through its religion and Indian culture. The aim is to build India – that is to profess and follow the spirit of Nationalism.

The problem that is troubling the Indians cannot be put down by force but only by conquering and mastering the intellect and the spirit. Thus, they can achieve freedom of man and can conquer external force.

The love of politics and nationalism is the love of one's country and one's fellow citizens, the greatness and happiness of the country and relieving from their sufferings would be the greatest service to motherland.

Nationalism, however, for Aurobindo is not only a fight for his country but to him Nationalism is a religion. It is a religion to revive the ancient Hindu religious traditions, which lays the pride of past India, to fight for the present that is in pain and to build a future based on rich Indian traditions and its past glory. The past glory of India as Aurobindo says, is the rich ancient spiritual culture that has lost its glory due to many external forces such as foreign invasion and rulers, which he wants to revive and bring back what was India's glory so that they could live with pride of their own culture.

Therefore, he works to bring the Divine will and intellect that is in men. He believes when the divine is awoken can bring about revolutions permitting to do great service for the nation. Thus, his nationalism aims to bring in the hearts a likeness of a nation that can carved to free oneself before the country can be free.

The freedom that is within is the freedom without fear and the realization and understanding of one's freedom is a great power, which will allow India to fulfill individual's duty to stand for the motherland. Henceforth, his nationalism awakens a political sense in his people and revives the spirit of India that was once a land of the saints and spirituals. In the lines below, Aurobindo talked about the new nationalism he is trying to create,

“The new Nationalism...is an attempt to create a nation in India by reviving the spirit and action of the ancient Indian character, the strong, great and lofty spirit of old *Aryavarta* and setting it on fire, and mould the methods

and materials of modernity for the freedom, greatness and well-being of a historic and immortal people...India". (*Chanda Poddar, Mona Sarkar and Bob Zwicker, Sri Aurobindo and the Freedom of India, p.19*).

Aurobindo is trying to build India based on the immortal past of its spiritual glory instead of an Anglicized nation that is unrecognizable as India. India at present is clouded with a fateful future but the demand and desire for a common spirit of enthusiasm for reliving the spiritual glory can fulfill the vision of the future soon and this he says is the heart of nationalism.

Of nationalism, Aurobindo says it should be a religion and we can further ask the question of what he is projecting when he says nationalism is a religion. Religion is what one believes in and follows devotedly that also contains moral codes of conducts governing both spiritual and human affairs in everyday life.

Therefore, when he meant that nationalism is a religion, there should be something more than just awakening in his fellow citizens the need of a political mass. The mass should believe in freeing its country but when he is trying to build and create a new India from its glorious past it also means that there is something above that will act as a force since the old India was known for its rich Hindu traditions, *yoga*, saints and mystics.

This leads to further question of who are the yogis, saints and mystics. They are the spiritual leaders who lead the spirituality of the people in ancient Hindu tradition of India. Thus, reliving and reviving India to its past glory is regaining and bringing back the old Hindu tradition, through which he believes the problem of nationalism (that they were nagged and ruled over by British, suppressing their culture and not

allowing them to function according to their freedom) could be solved. Let us look at the lines of Aurobindo where he talked about how people accepted the fight for a new national spirit in the lines below,

“Nationalism has come to the people as a religion, and it has been accepted as a religion. However, certain forces, which are against that religion, are trying to crush its rising strength.” (*Chanda Poddar, Mona Sarkar and Bob Zwicker, Sri Aurobindo and the Freedom of India, p.20*).

However, Aurobindo asserts by saying that when God is going to be born in the people with the preaching of a new religion, certain forces rise with weapons in hand to crush that religion. He was but determined that no weapon is going to crush nationalism since it will survive in the strength of God. He believed nationalism will thus be immortal and cannot die because it is not a human thing.

Thus, what is needed here in India as the need of the hour is a mass of spiritual people who will devote anything for the liberation of India and under the guidance of spiritual men will be the attainment of ‘*Swaraj*’ through spiritual means. The task and aim of achieving the self-rule is nothing but which will allow them to build a new spiritual nation.

Although Aurobindo started with active politics to bring about change in his motherland and had been a leader. However, his realization that political gains also could be achieved through spirit led to politics, which was in the beginning a mere political movement to him become a part of his spiritual task.

To build a spiritual life of India is the endeavor to lead the world. The fight is not only political and spiritual freedom of India but works towards spiritual progress of

the human race. The basis of spiritual foundation and progress is a free human being that can freely express oneself and realizing the divine within could bring divine life on earth. Hence, it should be a spiritually inspired life to create a new nation.

In building a new nation, is he trying to establish religious nationalism or is he trying to project Hinduism in nationalism because building a new spiritual nation based on the ancient Hindu tradition would mean building a new Hindu nation. This is an issue and a problem that needs to be tackled, which will be dealt with in the following chapters.

2.3.2 Religious Nationalism

Religious nationalism is of two types: the relationship of nationalism to a particular religious belief or affiliation, which can be further broken down into two aspects:

“The politicization of religion and the influence of religion on politics.” (Juergensmeyer Mark, *“The worldwide rise of religious nationalism.” Journal of International Affairs, Vol.50, no. 1).*

Since nationalism is a religion to Aurobindo and not only a fight, he may support the later aspect of religious nationalism. The urge is nothing but a religion of ancient India free from western culture, promoting the uniqueness of India.

Influence here may mean three things:

- i) Influence on politics, culture and education coming from external forces.
- ii) The essence or the integral influence that springs from among the people of India within to feel the need of its freedom and unique culture.

- iii) A relational influence is another thing. This kind of influence is concerned with how external influence and influence from within is connected.

Aurobindo is concerned with all the three and he is trying to bridge how external problems could be understood and given a solution to internal influence allowing to free his people from the shackles of external forces. To this problem, he found, re-living the glorious past history would put a stop to the foreign rule. However, to re-live the past involves living in the spirit.

Living in the spirit involves religion since religion cannot be isolated but is seen as part of history, social, economic and political etc. In itself, religion has no value but has relation with social and economic life of religion. Religion is an intrinsic and an essential part of human existence.

We shall see as Radhakrishnan gives the advantages of religion and are innumerable. He said,

“Religion is the discipline which touches the conscience and helps us to struggle with evil and sordidness, saves us from greed, lust, hatred, releases moral power and imparts courage in the enterprise of saving the world”.
(*S.Radhakrishnan, Religion and Society, p.42*).

According to Rabindranath Tagore also, religion for him is the essence of human being. He holds that the world and its particulars are real because they are an expression of the divine. He preaches that the path to realization of the divine includes creative activity and for Tagore creative activity was his writing, painting, composing and educating.

He thus challenges us to discover the creative spirit that is within us so that we can be better religious and become better people. However, he does not set a rule to follow and to realize the spirit that is in us. His religion would mean then a more secular and liberal religious view because in trying to discover the spirit in oneself, he moves towards the transformation of a society from a closed religious value to a more social aspect of life.

A creative activity such as painting and writing is a secular progress where religion does not take the authority of governance. It can be understood thus in a process of social and cultural significance, particularly through modernization, religion loses its authority and seemed to become more restricted.

Therefore, in a more secularized manner of finding the spirit for divine expression as Tagore seeks would include in a decline of religion. However, finding the divine in oneself can be achieved through experience and there need to be a deep thorough understanding of the inner self trying to find the spirit secularly.

Religion is very much a part of man's inner life and human existence but when brought down into politics, could it solve the problem of external forces forced upon the nation? Alternatively, does it describe that the country's nationalism had failed and thus looking for an alternative? These are questions of problems, which I will be dealing with in the later chapter.

Nevertheless, if we consider religion to solve the problem of nationalism, can we say a universal religion as Vivekananda advocates solve the problem? His nature of universal religion does not mean that all humankind should follow one doctrine since not all religion can accept one set of universal rituals. He teaches each must grow according to one's own law yet understand the spirit of each other.

Vivekananda's teachings and preaching showed the real path of universal religion and personal spiritual upliftment. Religion, he feels is a necessary aspect of human life because it manifests the divine already in man.

Vivekananda said,

“Of all forces that have worked and are still working to mould the destiny of human race, none certainly is more potent than that, the manifestation of which we call Religion.” (*Basant Kumar Lal, Contemporary Indian Philosophy, p. 37*)

He holds that there is nothing but man's craving for religious upliftment, which alone can give a person real peace and solidarity. However, because of the various religious sects, he had tried to establish the inner truth of every religion. He shows that though there are conflicts regarding religious opinion of their own sect among religious groups but the inner spirituality is the same. Vivekananda uses an example to support his universal religion with this,

“Suppose we all go with vessels in our hands to draw water from the lake. One has a cup, another jar, another a bucket, and so forth, and we all fill our vessels. The water in each case takes the form of the vessel carried by each of us, but in every case, water, and nothing but water is in the vessel....God is like that water filling these different vessels, and in the vision of God comes in the form of the vessel. Yet He is one” (*Swami Vivekananda, Complete works of Swami Vivekananda, p.464*).

This leads to the question of whether religion as a universal religion solves all the problems of nationalism. Here, Aurobindo's aim of realizing and bringing down the Divine in man, solving the country's problem of nationalism and his attempt is directed towards religious nationalism.

"What –are-common-characteristics-of-religious nationalism?" posted by John Oaks on July 12, 2005 on Evidence for Christianity, says he would define religious nationalism as a political situation in which a nation or a sovereign government sponsors in some way an official national church. He says.

"The common characteristics of religious nationalism are;

- a) Government support through use of national funds to support the clergy of that religion.
- b) Pressure on the government to support the moral and ethical beliefs of that religious groups.
- c) Attempts by the government to suppress other religious groups (the extent of this varies a lot from case to case).
- d) A tendency for the clergy of that religion to become corrupt and for devotion and depth of conviction of adherents to that religious group to diminish with time".

These are the chief symptoms he sees from study of history.

However, the religious nationalism of Aurobindo is different from John Oaks. The point Oaks hold is a religious group of people or religion suppressing and exercising religious power over government.

The religious nationalism of Aurobindo does not involve government but he is more concern in establishing a spiritual nationalism to bring out his people from the

suppression of the government. His spiritual nationalism is nothing but will be to revive again the glorious past of India and not pressuring the government but to prove that India has its own glory that cannot afford to be suppressed or ruled by others.

So long, he had felt the much needed spiritual awakening of the country and his people. Nevertheless with his arrest in the Alipore bomb case, where he was been kept in solitary confinement for a year led him to spiritual growth and spiritual concerns, where he felt spirituality needs to be analyzed at every stage of his vision. The year in prison marks a transition and shift in his political activities, vision and life to a more spiritual concerned life and he emerged as a mystic not concerned anymore with his political career but now believed truth and realization can be attained through spirituality and social evolution.

The start as a nationalist leader has now moved onto become a spiritual mystic. Aurobindo is now, in for his dream of complete independence, which sought to achieve through spirituality and he brought his *Integral Yoga*.

2.4 The *Integral Yoga* of Aurobindo:

What is Aurobindo's *Integral Yoga*? It is difficult to explain exactly that a set of this or that meditation is his *yoga* because it is a different kind of *yoga*, which touches and synthesizes all the other traditional type or aspects of *yoga*. However, generally we can say, the *Integral Yoga* or 'Purna' *yoga* of Aurobindo is the kind of *yoga* in which he meditates for individual salvation and extend the liberated state for fulfillment of greater Divine intentions, i.e, for liberating other souls.

How is *Integral Yoga* different from all other *yogas*? What distinguishes the *Integral Yoga* from the other traditional *yogas* is that it makes use of all the powers and potentialities of man in reaching the Divine. It has woven into its fabric the strands

of all *yogas* that existed in India. “In the traditional *yogas*, either one power or group of powers of the being is used as means to the realization and union with one phase of the Divine but in *Integral Yoga*, all the powers are combined so as to make the resulting synthesis an effective instrument of divine transformation.”

As mentioned above, the *Integral Yoga*, which is an approach towards self-perfection, Aurobindo combines the Hindu *yoga* paths of knowledge, devotion and karma and aims for transforming the entire being. The spiritual evolution should be set into the world casting aside mistakes to manifest Divine consciousness. He had tried to reach the Divine through his *yoga*, which combined all the traditional *yogas* in India. He says,

“An integral and synthetic *yoga* needs especially not to be bound by any written or traditional *shastra*; for while it embraces the knowledge received from the past, it seeks to organize it anew for the present and the future. An absolute liberty of experience and of the restatement of knowledge in new terms and new combinations is the condition of its self-formation.”(*Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, p.57*).

The combination of all *yogas* or the *Integral Yoga* is trying to embrace and seeking all life in itself. To that extent, it is a pathfinder trying to conform a new starting point, which sought to embrace the ancient system in its destination. It is therefore needful to look and have a brief idea about the traditional *yogas*, as the uniqueness of *Integral Yoga* lies in the way in which it synthesizes the elements taken from the different traditional *yogas*.

Amongst the most popular and well known *Yogas* are the three kinds of traditional *Yogas* i.e.,

Hatha Yoga

Raja Yoga

The Triple Path

- i. *Hatha Yoga*: removes the imperfections of the body. There are numerous asanas or fixed postures in *Hatha yoga* that first cures the restlessness in the body. It also simply refers to physical *yoga* postures. Thus, it is practiced to align mind, body and spirit that will prepare for meditation.
- ii. *Raja Yoga*: Also known as *Patanjali yoga* perfects and liberates the mental being. After *Hatha yoga* removes the restlessness of the body, *raja yoga* control both mental and emotions. This is practiced with open eyes making it easy and versatile that can be practiced anywhere.
- iii. *The Triple Path*: There is a triple path in *yoga* and differs from *Raja yoga* that seizes the central principle of the heart, intellect and will and does not occupy the practice and training of the mental or perfection of the body.

The triple path or *Trimarga* of Aurobindo is a) Knowledge b) Devotion and c) Works.

- i) Knowledge aims to realize the unique and supreme self.
- ii) Devotion aims for the enjoyment of supreme love and utilizes the conception of the Supreme Lord. That is enjoying the supreme personality as a divine lover and enjoyer of the universe.
- iii) Works aims at every human activity for an activity that dedicates to the supreme will.

It is in the triple path that we come most readily to the absolute knowledge, love and service of the one in all beings and in the entire cosmic manifestation.

However, the *yoga* of Aurobindo does not stop with the attainment of liberation as the other *yogas* do but his *yoga* seek and tries to attain something more than that. Thus, it says that his *yoga* starts where the other *yoga* stops because he goes beyond until there is attainment and realization of the Divine. In his *Integral Yoga*, he had gathered the essential elements of spiritual experiences that have gained by the paths of divine communion and spiritual realization.

Aurobindo was in search of a more complete experience that can unite and harmonize spirit and matter where his *yoga* leads to the paths of spirit. He said the practice of this *yoga* does not proceed through mental teaching or through set of prescribed meditation, but by aspiration and self-concentration aspiring to open up to the Divine that is above and its workings. Therefore, here aspiration does not mean desiring for something but turning towards and seeking the Divine. The need of an inner soul is the aspiration. He rises to the spirit to bring the light, power, and bliss of the spirit into life to transform humanity and that can be seen in his lines where he says,

“I am seeking to bring some principle of inner Truth, Light, Harmony, Peace into the earth-consciousness; I see it above and know what it is-I feel it ever gleaming down on my consciousness from above and I am seeking to make it possible for it to take up the whole being into its own native power, instead of the nature of man continuing in half-light, half-darkness.” (*Chanda Poddar, Mona Sarkar and Bob Zwicker, Sri Aurobindo and the Freedom of India, p.146*).

By achieving inner truth, Aurobindo believes that it will pave a way for the descent of truth opening and would lead to a development of the consciousness that is divine. It will then be the final sense of earth's evolution.

His *yoga* also works on the balanced unity of the physical world and meditation. Only a balance maintained between this two can attain self-realization and self-perfection. Through meditation, one realizes the true and free expression of the self that will allow one to acquire spiritual insights that can ultimately free a person.

On the other hand, our being in the physical world relates us to the other fellow beings living together; helping one another in realizing that can work together towards establishing a Divine society. His establishment can be understood with this statement,

"If we are to be free in the spirit, if we are to be subject only to the supreme Truth, we must discard the idea that our mental or moral laws are binding on the Infinite or that there can be anything sacrosanct, absolute or eternal even in the highest of our existing standards of conduct." (*Sri Aurobindo, The Synthesis of Yoga, p.191*).

To form a higher standard is the need to serve the divine. When the soul realizes this truth, an individual will work towards their divine fullness for an increased perfection. As Aurobindo says, the Divine is already in us and we have to direct our attention towards it and let it work in our lives. Nevertheless, according to each person's uniqueness, the approach of the spiritual path may differ but the key to Divine is self-surrender and self-aspiration. Therefore, the spiritual practice be taken for the sake of the Divine itself and should not be self-seeking.

However, when there is no one universal religion, it will fail to fulfill what it aims to achieve. In regard for the realization of the divine, Aurobindo writes,

“We are Hindus and naturally spiritual in our temperament, because the work which we have to do for humanity is a work which no other nation can accomplish, the spiritualization of the race: so the men whom we worship are those who have helped the spiritual progress of mankind.” (*Sri Aurobindo Ghose, A biography of his vision and ideas, spirituality and Nationalism, Verinder Grover, p.53*).

If we were to understand what the expression of this statement meant, then we can point that Aurobindo is saying Hindus are more spiritual than the others and are responsible for making humankind spiritual. That would then mean nothing other than reducing the concept of spiritual nation to Hinduism and a Hindu nation.

Further, if he does not mean to say ‘we are Hindus’ as reducing anything to Hindu faith but mean Indians are Hindus then how is he trying to build a nation or how can he establish a nation without Hindus? Nevertheless, it is clear that he wants to build a spiritual nation based on Hindu notion that is omitting most of them or some people who are not Hindus. If not every Indians are Hindus then there is no inclusive view of him towards his nation. It is as simple as saying that if the omitted are not Hindus then his way of building a universal spiritual nation is not possible and has failed.

However, his *Integral Yoga* aims not only to realize the Absolute or indistinguishable unity, but it also realizes the Absolute in infinite diversity. His *Integral Yoga* does not aim for an individual liberation but tries for a divine manifestation in all human beings. His *yoga* does not suppress the lower level of

consciousness but is a transformation of all human beings at the level of physical, mental and vital too. Divine consciousness as Supermind will descend into earth's consciousness, first into human consciousness; then it will spread out in all parts of the world. According to Aurobindo, earth is the best sphere for divine transformation and direct contact with the divine is the easiest on earth because the psychic being or the divine spark can be found only on earth.

Nevertheless, if the ultimate achievement of *yoga* or for that matter attaining the Divine consciousness is not for an individual only but for the entire humanity, will one be able to realize the Divine in oneself without following the paths of *yoga*? This point will be addressed and discuss in another chapter later.

His method of spiritual enquiry was derived from the Indian tradition with the challenge of transcending through the conflict between religion and spirituality. If the challenge is attaining a universal spiritual goal for all then he should have looked upon other religions as equally important as his should. However, so far Aurobindo seemed to be engaged in ancient Hindu tradition with an aim of re-living and re-considering it.

Aurobindo had a clear system of practice synthesizing all the different paths of *yoga*. He said, relying on one's own effort to reach the divine is a long and difficult process. Therefore, he teaches that one should stay open to the mother (Mirra Richards) since she is a force that will bring divine consciousness. He is here relating to mother as a pure being. He is referring to her as a spiritual guide but not a God. Whenever one is doubtful of the paths to the divine, mother will clear confusion and lead man towards a greater consciousness of the divine and help in the right way to proceed into practice of concentration.

A common person is led by the common habits of the mind, the usual basis of daily life and thus is in ignorance. However, a purified mind can be used to reason the Divinity in man. As Sri Aurobindo also would say, to know what the Divine really is, the consciousness cannot remain in the mind realm. The shift is to focus above the mind, to a higher consciousness, which he calls “the Supramental consciousness (above the mind) also called the self, the spirit, the Divine”.

He preaches that the Divine consciousness can be attained even on earth or while one is in the physical body. Some practitioners would ascend to the higher realm after withdrawing from the world but Aurobindo was of the opinion that one can reach and explore the upper world, and will be able to live in the world of the spirit and at the same time can bring down into our everyday life ‘the Divine in things.’ Thus, his way is of manifesting Divine into the material and physical plane, though he also agrees that ascetism has its own place. Aurobindo said;

“I am concerned with the earth, not with worlds beyond for their own sake; it is a terrestrial realization that I seek and not a flight to distant summits.” (*Chanda Poddar, Mona Sarkar and Bob Zwicker, Sri Aurobindo and the Freedom of India, p.147*).

In the system of Aurobindo, one ascends not only to the mind, vital and body but then also into the Divine but brings down the Supramental consciousness into the mind and then into the body and man would have Divine life on earth. Thus, while most yogis are interested only in ascending upward towards realization of the spirit, Aurobindo work towards bringing down the Supramental into matter and body.

For a progressive manifestation of life and body, the Supramental is the truth consciousness. The Supramental in its descent will bring down the full truth

consciousness of life and matter. If Supramental power establishes on earth as a greater force, then there will be harmony and greater unity will emerge everywhere. This is exactly how he wants the Supramental power to work on earth believing that when the above power dominates there will be peace and harmony. These harmonies will then slowly change and establish throughout the world.

For Aurobindo, the object of *yoga* or what *yoga* aims for is not becoming a great *yogi* or a superman. It aims for a possession of the divine presence and a divine consciousness that will work in the will and a life that could be an instrument of the divine. A love for the divine and divine's sake alone should be the object of attainment. Though liberation comes by, *yoga* should not aim for *moksha* but a greater goal.

Thus, it aims to open a path for a divine consciousness that will allow to live more and more in the inner consciousness though in an external world. When there is divine consciousness, there is a power of the psychic to purify and transform it to be ready for a union with divine knowledge. For a development of divine or yogic consciousness is to become aware of the cosmic forces to be in union with the divine. The consciousness here realizes the truth and its transformation that descent into the earth.

The *yoga* as developed and followed by Aurobindo can be thus seen that it has a purpose different from other traditional *yogas*. To be more precise, its aim is a rise into the divine consciousness out from the ignorant ordinary world.

This is a difficult aim of *yoga* and may seem impossible to many. However, only when one is ready to give up everything and risk for this divine possibility then only there is a hope to experience the truth behind it.

As the process of *yoga* purposes its ways and the ultimate aim of *yoga* just discussed, one can understand that the concentration gets deeper by following the inward opening. One becomes more conscious of the Divine element that is within. After working and concentrating on the mind, the mind is more capable to receiving spiritual experiences and spiritual knowledge.

As had been discussed earlier, Aurobindo's integral system of *yoga* is a rush upward movement of the completely lower consciousness and then the descent of Supramental or Divine consciousness and its force into our body. Once the divine consciousness and Supramental power is realized, the worldly life that we live would seem to become superficial without a connection to the soul.

As it is the case in other yogic disciplines, the enlightenment or realization is the end goal. However, Aurobindo said this is not the end of the spiritual path because enlightenment does not transform the being as a whole since there is no change at the lower level of the mind. As Aurobindo calls it, the lower being will be able to completely transform only by Supramentalization. A spiritual transformation means bringing down the Divine consciousness into all parts of the lower being and the consciousness will be replaced by higher consciousness.

In the spiritual path sometimes, one is depressed and frustrated because of the slow progress or sometimes the influences from outside do not allow the practitioner to gain Divine consciousness. However, with such resistances, transformation still gradually infuses into the physical if there is Divine consciousness and peace. The spiritual path itself will show doubts but one's mind when brought under control and hopes to reach divine consciousness will with the Divine's influence achieve its goal. Aurobindo holds that,

“To be ourselves liberated from ego and realize our true selves is the first necessity, all else can be achieved as a luminous result, a necessary consequence.” (*Madhav Pundalik Pandit, Sri Aurobindo study in the light of his Thought, p.233*).

The imperative to accept a spiritual call is one reason that spirituality will take precedence over all other claims, which belongs to the domain of ignorance. Therefore, to realize truth and the integral good, nothing can substitute the spiritual change that comes through the spirit.

To realize this divine truth, the path of *Integral Yoga* needs to be followed. The paths of *yoga* are clear and just as Aurobindo practiced and meditated, one has to follow this path to realize the divine power that is already within us.

Like his *Integral Yoga*, most of Aurobindo's writings have emerged from his spiritual thoughts and experiences. The mental level of reason is more elevated in a spiritual plane. He wants to communicate his experience to the reader through his poetic revelation for which he has used symbols, images and suggestions. The thoughts of his *yogic* experience are manifests in his poems especially in his “*Savitri*”.

Savitri is a mystic poetry of the highest order that celebrates the greatness and glory of God and the possibility of establishing divine life on earth.

He writes:

“What seemed herself was an image of the whole.

She was a subconscious life of tree and flower,

The outbreak of the honied buds of spring;

She burned in the passion and splendor of the rose,
She was the red heart of the passion - flower,
The dream – white of the lotus in its pool,
Out of subconscious life she climbed to mind,
She was thought and passion of the world's heart,
She was the godhead hid in the heart of man,
She was the climbing of his soul to God.
The cosmos flowered in her, she was its bed.
She was Time and the dreams of God in Time;
She was space and the wideness of his days.
From this she rose where Time and Space were not;
The superconscious was her native air,
Infinity was her movement's natural space;
Eternity looked out from her on Time". (*Savitri Sri Aurobindo, p.557*).

These lines of his poem from *Savitri* explain the Mind trying to reach the divine. In the above lines, 'she' is *Savitri* who is an image of the whole. The passion and grace should arise from the heart like her to ultimately transcend human mind and make life on earth an abode of God. He is seeking to divinize the earth, which should be

the true nature of the self-determining a divine knowledge. Mind seeks for truth and this knowledge will manifests the play of truth force.

The need to realize the possibility to Supramentalize mind had been the dynamic aim of Aurobindo's *yoga*. When there is the descent of Supermind, then as he aimed, perfection as the highest in humanity can come. Discovering one's true self could bring down the Supramental force to transform mind, life and body.

A reawakening and reconstruction of human unity is an attempt towards regenerating the human race and Aurobindo is among one such important figure of social thinkers, who worked to bring about social-political and spiritual change in his society. A perfect life, unity and harmony on earth should be one of the best results of the Divine transformation of our existence. However, how far has he achieved his goal in reforming the society after his liberation is a question that will be addressed in the following chapter.

The seer uses thought for a means of expression only; but the Supramental thought is a form of the knowledge of the divine or the Supramental vision. Supramental thought concerns greater spiritual concreteness like Aurobindo's experiences are also Supramental by which higher knowledge, vision or thoughts were expressed. Supramental thought concerns not only earthly human consciousness but also all planes of consciousness. By his *Integral Yoga*, Aurobindo has experiences of Supramental thought in the spirit.

His system of *yoga* can be explored in a similar way to Nagarjuna. Aurobindo saw India's freedom and their spiritual culture was nagged and being suppressed by foreign rulers. This has largely brought down the society from self- expression.

He thus visions for liberation of his people, upholds the theory of spiritual evolution, and then with an aim to transform man to Superman (his ideal spiritual man) and

then bring divine in to the material physical world. Indians are suffering in the hands of the British people, who at length are trying to put a stop to their old culture and ways of living. They think Indian culture is barbarous and trying to nag and replaced it with their own rule and culture, which is causing trouble among them. Therefore, to overcome this problem, what Aurobindo believed could solve the problem is an expansion of consciousness. When the consciousness moves towards higher consciousness and spirit be realized there can be illuminating of spiritual consciousness that will allow understanding of their own spirit. The first root cause of problem he detected and realized as just mentioned was the limitation of consciousness.

Let us take the example of Nagarjuna here. Nagarjuna after finding the problems and the root cause of ignorance, which he does in a step-by-step process, had abandoned the physical phenomena and went in search of the ultimate truth and thus attains liberation. On the other hand, in Aurobindo's transformation, he soars and ascends towards Supermind and Divine consciousness. Nevertheless, his search of truth does not stop there, instead from there he again descends consciousness downwards to the lower forms of mind, body, life and vital for life's divinization. Hence, Aurobindo never abandons the physical body.

As his system of *yoga*, meditation and its goal explains, he aims liberation for all humans, not just attaining the Divine for oneself but to others as well as to reach the ultimate truth. In trying to reach to the masses for liberation, question arises whether he in any way has touch upon other faiths, which can also be an alternative to achieving Divine consciousness. Aurobindo influenced and moved by the Hindu tradition, culture and its ancient spiritual glory mostly founded his teachings based on the Hindu texts on ancient Indian culture.

The aim to divinize the entire humanity is to ask whether he has involved in his goal other faiths. It is seen that he has failed to touch and talk upon other faiths or religion, as he does not discussed the spiritual importance and necessity of other religion. To reach his ultimate goal where he says would be the liberation of the entire humanity, the other faiths, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh etc. also should be involved where the need is set of a system according to their religion or just in his system involves everybody and rendered equal importance as his should be.

A vision and goal of liberation of all can be attained not by reflecting upon the importance of one ethical group or religion but categories and mobilizing the resources and like of all human experiences and personalities will outgrow partialities. His emphasis on Hinduism alone had made it palpable that his interest lies on reaching to the people through Hinduism, which, can lead to more problems in imparting his vision.

Aurobindo's renunciation from politics was neither elation nor a disappointment. He does not say that he withdrew from politics in despair but for a full focus on *yoga* without any interference because he has a distinct goal. As his spiritual consciousness grows, he felt the need to divinize the earth. He thought and knew divinizing the earth will do best for him and his country. Therefore, his dissociation from politics was an initiation to spiritualize.

It can be said that his concept of nationalism was not only a political activity but also a sacrifice for spirituality. What is done in his nationalism is an offering done to the Divine. The inner spiritual freedom has pushed him towards the idea of a Supermind because he is not satisfied with a mere spiritualized society but is more interested in a higher level of divinized and spiritualized society.

The evolving of man beyond the Supermind will eventually lead to the emergence of a new being whom he calls 'Superman'. The idea of 'Superman' as conceived by Aurobindo can be said to have derived from Nietzsche's idea of "*Übermensch*" but Aurobindo gave it a *Vedantic* and spiritual character. Aurobindo always had western influence but whenever there is an advocacy of western ideal, he would give it a spiritual touch of India and transform it in the light of India.

Nietzsche uses the idea of superman as a foundation to attempt and to challenge the ingrained values of society and is a crucial element of his work. He aims that for a society to have its true potential is to have a system of values that will exactly fit and suit the need of the society. For this, he gives the idea of "Superman", who is a real individual and is confidently fixed in the changing world.

2.5 Nietzsche's Concept of Superman

According to Nietzsche,

"The Superman is someone who in discovering himself also discovers that it is in his best interests to reject any outside notions about values, trusting rather what he finds within himself." (*Crime and Punishment*, Dostoyevsku, Fyodor, p.306).

Like Aurobindo who believed that, the attainment of Supermind or Supramental truth would bring truth consciousness and transform humankind, Nietzsche also believed that the superman (*Übermensch*) is the person who will be able to break from the illusion of the worldview. Nietzsche also believed that the right course for humankind would be discovered eventually when the world would work through Nihilism, although Nihilists does not believe that there were moral truths. The *Übermensch* will basically recognize that the definition of morality in society is

socially constructed and also biased. For that reason, the *Urbmensch* will create its own morality than rather accept those moralities that are dictated by the social constructs or institution like the church. Thus, what makes *Urbmensch* a superior being is the ability to look beyond illusion. With this power, the superman embraces the idea of change and knows that since nothing is permanent, what exists now will eventually be replaced by something. The superman will create his own good and evil that will help to realize its own potentialities. It will thus realize that evil is what hampers and good helps one to recognize its potentialities.

The superman is dedicated for advancing the betterment of humanity. As he is aware of the existence of suffering, he is willing to sacrifice his own self to improve humanity. Since everything in the world is transitory according to Nietzsche including evil and good, everything is continually reinvented. The superman sees himself in the same light and knows these aspects must be overcome. Therefore, the superman is the ideal of someone who has practiced to overcome oneself.

The *Urbmensch* is but very much like the Supermind that is yet to appear. The superman is an ideal to strive towards for that will one day save the world but is not yet a person among us.

2.6 Aurobindo's Concept of Superman

The Superman for Aurobindo is a part or the parcel of God. The Supermind is Superman, according to Aurobindo and thus it is obvious that the Superman is an advance realization of God.

In general, the practice of *yoga* stops when one attains liberation and self-realization. However, Aurobindo starts his *Integral Yoga* after attaining liberation in order to reach the next level which he calls "Supramental transformation". Hence, his epigram "Aurobindo's *yoga* starts where other *yoga* ends". This is to become the

Superman (the divine being) after reaching the Divine. This is the way of his *Integral Yoga*, how Aurobindo had come to reach the Superman or the Supermind after he developed his spiritual journey.

He felt spirituality should and need to be analyzed at every stage of his vision. There is no doubt that his prison year had marked a transition in his life from politics to a spiritual mystic. He believed and realized the spiritual truth of India to triumph over his people can also be achieved through spirituality. What India needed was a spiritual reinforcement and that needs to be instilled in social evolution.

However, we can ask the question if his real goal of solving the problem of nationalism was attained? Was he able to provide a solution to the problems of nationalism in the country and from British suppression? The reason of starting his spiritual journey in the beginning had tried to provide a solution towards the crisis in the country and towards human existence. When man will find his true self in the spirit, also would find ultimate truth. To what extent he was successful in achieving a goal for his country will be discussed in the following chapter.

Nevertheless, if analyzed properly from where he started as a political revolutionary to where he now landed as a spiritual mystic, there we see that his goal did not fulfill his aim. As a spiritual revolutionary, he did not start to seek his own individual liberation but for the masses. He was able to infuse a new spirit of transformation and the need to revive the spiritual past of India to Indians through his powerful messages. However, in the end, he was led to meditation and seclusion that leaves a gap of why his dream was not fulfilled. Nonetheless, considering his political goal as a political revolutionary lost its course for the bigger goal of liberating his people from foreign shackles.

After a spiritual development and coming back to considering meditation, it can be pointed out that in his thoughts, Aurobindo firstly emphasized on perfecting the individual towards making the individual realize the Divine being that is within, which will later solve greater problems of human kind.

However, perfecting the individual then perfecting the society first would be a long process. It is possible and can be criticized here that this goal was one-sided. There are such arguments raised and brought about to jeopardize him which I will be discussing in following chapters later. Aurobindo was led into achieving divine goals after realizing certain problem that could be solved by spiritual development.

“There are three fundamental problems, which gave direction to the spiritual quest and philosophical thinking of Sri Aurobindo.” (*Professor Haridas Chaudhary, The philosophy and Yoga of Sri Aurobindo.*)

The first problem arose from Aurobindo's perception of paradox in the national life of India. He was quick to appreciate the sublime heights of truth-vision that the ancient sages of India had attained. The cultural history of India is indeed the story of countless experiments with spiritual truth and a persistent endeavor through the ages to organize life and society in accordance with the highest spiritual values. It would be no exaggeration to say that spirituality is the dominant keynote of Indian civilization. Nonetheless, do we blame spirituality for a relative backwardness in the area of social, political and scientific domain in the life of Indians? This point also shall be tackled and discussed upon later.

The second problem concerns the opposition traditionally believed to exist between mysticism and action, between complete liberation and self-knowledge on the one hand, active physical existence, and social participation on the other. Ramakrishna, the great saint of *Daksineshwara*, said that his foremost disciple Narendra, later known as Swami Vivekananda, would act in this world for the good of others only so long as he was fully aware of his own spiritual identity. Immediately on realizing his identity, he would give up the body. To quote his exact words,

“*Narendrra* will not keep his body, if he knows who he is.
But I have put a veil over his eyes”. (*Swami Vivekananda, Swami Vivekananda on Himself, p. 32*).

Shankara, the great Vedanta teacher, says:

“As long as the book-learned man does not give up his mistaken identification with the body, organs, etc., which are unreal, there is no talk of emancipation for him, even if he be ever so erudite in the Vedanta philosophy”. (*Swami Madhavananda, Vivekachudamani of Shri Sankaracharya, p. 63*).

The third problem of Aurobindo arose from his concern for the future of man and civilization. He took interest not only on the fate of India as a nation but also the spiritual destiny of all mankind and the dynamics of history.

Aurobindo later discussed that pondering upon these problems had led him to thorough study of India authoritative texts such as the Vedas, the Upanishads and The Gita also had an ideal of liberation as Aurobindo also has, that is the liberation

to free from the bondage of ignorance and selfishness. Therefore, 'The Life Divine' of Aurobindo, developed from a spiritual standpoint to re-awaken the social and political life of his people.

It thus later developed as his dream to free India and divinize it. His Supramental vision is but a herculean task and cannot be understood by the ordinary mind unless in the light of a higher mind. It is through *Integral Yoga* and by its understanding, one can realize how in a Supramental vision, the spiritual glory of India can work best.

However, once the mind does not get into that pace, it is difficult for the practitioner also to realize the working of the Supramental consciousness. Even after getting the mind to that, true individuality is in absolute freedom, so, the attainment of spiritual liberation of an individual becomes a free choice whether the person would choose to be in transcendental peace or again follow the flow of life.

Thus, his *Integral Yoga* that implies not only the realization of a spiritual need but as has been discussing earlier, it also needs to realize the spirit that is within us. When one realizes this oneself, then there is a transforming of knowledge to a perfect knowledge and new synthesis of spiritual freedom. The philosophy of Aurobindo nevertheless is Integralism and its foundation is complete integral, so when loses focus and understanding would again fail to reflect his aim of philosophy. In other words, a perfect synthesis of knowledge with spiritual knowledge would fail, if integrality or the essential spiritual qualities were not understood.

2.7. Summary

The reality of spiritual intuition is an immediate insight or direct contact of ultimate reality. It is important to note that according to Aurobindo, a true harmonization of the totality of human experience is not possible through mere criticism of common sense and science, or through logico-empirical formulation of one-sided spiritual experience. According to him, a harmonization of the spirit and body or precisely in his words 'a divine being' can adequately be achieved only on the basis of integral spiritual realization, which means immediate experience of reality in its fullness of content and rich diversity of aspect.

CHAPTER 3

THE SPIRITUAL AESTHETIC OF AUROBINDO AND ANANDA KENTISH COOMARASWAMY

3.1 Introduction

A beautiful piece of artwork, an artist produces is always appreciated, valued, liked and admired for its aesthetic value. The activity of making something is an art and the product of this activity is an artwork. E.g., the idea put together by a potter is an art and the end product of the pot is an art work. Art, as its purpose, is neither to present beauty nor to represent an object of beauty but is sometimes more about expressing man's inner beauty and feelings.

In the creation of an artwork, the artist transforms the pre-conceived idea to a concrete object, communicates and gives the idea a form, which produces the aesthetic qualities in it. The purpose of art is to express feelings and thus in an artwork we see what an artist wants to express.

The Indian art has a unique identity underlying in it. The old traditions and Indian art tries to bring out the spiritual side of art that is present and hidden in the unique art of India. Art expresses and gives form to ideas. However, Indian aesthetic tries to

seek something beyond that is underlying these arts. Indian aesthetic thus tries to relive the old Indian spirituality and not just appreciate its beauty.

Some of the forerunners of spiritual aesthetics are Aurobindo and Ananda Coomaraswamy. Coomaraswamy's aesthetics is also integral like Aurobindo and he wanted to establish his theories of art on sound principles that will be sound for all men at all times. Although Aurobindo does not deny the lower forms of art, he gives spirituality the highest place of aesthetic experience. Likewise, Coomaraswamy also viewed art to be spiritualistic and his entire philosophy centers around aesthetic experience. Therefore, this chapter discusses the spiritual side of art as viewed by Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy to understand how they had brought the spiritual side of art in everything.

How did the two discover art? Aurobindo, with his return to India, had spiritual experiences that have helped him in his spiritual growth-later these experiences resulted in poetry, which he gives the highest place of aesthetic experience.

Coomaraswamy, on the other hand, had discovered art in Ceylon now Sri Lanka. He saw the ordinary folks busy with their crafts that have immense artistry in them. Their artistry gives them the idea to produce an object of their daily use and utility. In this way, he discovered that there is something more than what is just art but an ability to produce aesthetic. We shall now see how aesthetic give rise to experience other than ordinary experiences.

3.2 What is Aesthetic?

Aesthetic is defined as a philosophy of beauty and art or a philosophy enquiring into the form of beauty or the allied properties of beauty. However, aesthetic defines as beauty has its doubts and therefore attempts were made to define the possibility of art and beauty.

We are surrounded by many beautiful things in our day to day lives that hold our attention. It can be a simple beautiful object that becomes meaningful for us and attracts the beholder in a unique manner. A beautiful bed of flowers, landscape, the serene beauty of the sea, a beautiful forest etc. in nature enthralls one so much so that it will transform the person and born in them a poet or an artist.

We wonder why there is such immense pleasure in seeing beautiful things that makes us happy and have the capacity to hold our attention. To this wonder of questions such as, what is the purpose of beautiful thing? What is beauty? Why beautiful objects derive enjoyment and many other related questions land us in the philosophy of beauty.

To define beauty is also to speculate art, which inspires us to re-create and help the creativity of man in bringing out the idea of the form into object. The work of art is created for various purposes such as utility, beauty. Art sometimes is defined to represent ideas of the mind or to express feelings and emotions that moved the artist.

Art as such thus calls to reveal the secret creativity, evoking an emotion that also determines the artist's response to truth of beautiful, unraveling the mystery of understanding of what we call beauty and art i.e. aesthetics.

3.3 Aesthetic Experience

There is significance and value in the reaction created by beautiful things. The experience that arises in contact between mind and beautiful objects of aesthetic experience are not ordinary experiences that we experience in our everyday life. Whenever, there is art and beauty reference there is a reference of associated experience that follows. The experience is aesthetic experience. It is a distinct experience and is characterized by certain features such as an elevated experience, an experience that moves us completely to another level of experience. Aesthetic experience is an admissible importance in aesthetic.

Whatever exists either as beauty or art comes in contact with our mind and gives rise to consciousness which we feel in the form of experience. To call something beautiful is to say that it is a source of experience. It is not ordinary experience but has a valuable and extensive excellence of experience that is a stimulus of delight

and experience. The qualities of beauty treated as aesthetic experience as perceived by the mind qualifies the experience that makes it different from other experiences.

When we see a beautiful flower, there is pleasure in viewing the flower and on the other hand when eating an ice cream, we feel the pleasure of eating a tasty ice cream naturally. However, we do not have an interest in the object when it comes to beauty unlike when eating the ice cream.

An object is presented before us as beautiful but the object is just there as beautiful and we even do not really care about whether or not the object is real. We cannot say the taste is beautiful and in the case of beauty, the beautiful is not good but pleasant. Thus, beautiful is what pleases a man and good is esteemed.

We can say Indian aesthetics departs from this point of western aesthetics. According to Indian aesthetics, beautiful is not what pleases a man but beautiful sees beyond beauty that underlies in it the spiritual aesthetics and spiritual experience. What is aesthetics and what it concerns to do is the core aspect of Indian aesthetics. It is also concerned with question of what it means to say when something is beautiful.

In trying to explain aesthetics in the Indian context, it would seem prudent to put what the classical India actually looked like in aesthetics. In the context of aesthetics, we see by what measure we can exactly experience aesthetic experience when we see a beautiful work of art or when we see actors exactly acting out with full of emotions that move our emotions as well. However, Indian aesthetic tries to find something other than pleasant and beautiful underlying these arts. It seeks a spiritual experience that can move us spiritually. This leads to what is Indian aesthetics.

3.4 Indian Aesthetic

The earliest speculation of Indian art and its purpose was set forth by *Bharata* in his *Natyasastra* attributing it to performing arts such as dance, music and drama and present a detailed inquiry into the various forms of drama, its origin and theories.

What is *Natya*? *Natya* or drama is a dramatic representation with speech, music and dancing. *Natyasastra*, in the form of *Rasa* theory has laid down the cornerstone for Indian Aesthetics as an imperative of understanding and appreciation of all Indian art.

The *Rasa* theory is one of the most authentic and original theories in Oriental arts, which is given immense importance because of its merits. To understand *Rasa* theory is to know what is *Rasa*?

“The word *Rasa* is derived from the root ‘*Rasah*’ meaning sap or juice, taste, flavor, relish. The extract of a fruit refers to as ‘*Rasa*’, which itself is the essence of it, the ultimate flavor of it”. (*Rajesh Kumar Sharma, Rasa, p. 73*).

The concept of “*Rasa*” is an important and the most significant the most contribution of the Indian mind to aesthetics. The word *Rasa* has no equivalence in word or concept in any other language or art of the world hitherto known to us. Any object that is capable of providing pleasure is considered the source of *Rasa*.

A *Rasa* denotes an essential mental state in Indian aesthetics and is a dominant emotional theme in the work of art. A *Rasa* is a primary feeling that is evoked in the person that views, reads or hears such a work. It can also be understood as an actor’s aesthetic experience or more specially a spectator’s experience.

All objects capable of providing pleasure to various sense organs were considered the source of *Rasa*. It symbolizes relish or delight as the word *Rasa* is also

interpreted as taste always associated with juice or fluids. It further implies sensuous pleasure of enjoyment of taste derived from objects, which have certain kind of juices.

In Indian philosophy, the word *Rasa* not only means aesthetic pleasure; but *Rasa* also alludes to a higher spiritual essence. This means *Rasa* does not stand for ordinary kind of pleasure but rather the kind of aesthetic pleasure, which is refined and connects to the world of spirit or Brahman.

Though by *Rasa*, *Bharata* means only *Natya Rasa*, others apply it to poetry in general. In the case of poetry, after poetry is produced, it becomes an object of art and functions as an interest to the reader and the hearer, which later creates in mind the aesthetic mood originally felt by the poet.

A condition to have a poetic communication is through experience (experiential competence) because without experience the reader certainly does not share any aesthetic mood before reading the poem. Experiential competence has the ability to feel sorrow, fear, love etc. In other words, permanent emotions (*Sthayibhavas*) are present in all three.

In an aesthetic context, *Rasa* is described as sentiments and *Bharata* classifies *Rasa* under eight categories associating it with eight lasting emotions and eight transitory feelings that evokes different kinds of *Rasa*.

The two kinds of *Rasas* are:

Permanent emotion (*Sthayibhavas*)

Temporary emotion (*Vyabhicaribhavas*).

The *Sthayibhavas* are:

Rati (love)

Hasa (laughter)

Soka (sorrow)

Krodha (anger)

Bhaya (fear)

Utsaha (enthusiasm)

Jugupsa (disgust)

Vismaya (wonder).

The *Sthayibhavas* are permanent emotions and they are the permanent feeling that is in us. That is why we laugh at something that appears funny to us, feels sad to see somebody in pain or gets angry when one is not obeyed. Thus, any of these permanent emotions arises when one comes across a situation that brings out one of these emotions.

The *Vyabhicaribhavas* are:

Srngara (amorous)

Hasya (comic)

Karuna (pathos)

Raudra (furious)

Bhayanaka (horror)

Vira (heroism)

Vibhatsa (odious)

Adbhuta (wonderous).

However, the eight *vyabhicaras* or the temporary emotions arise when we see a good drama (natya). Here, when one is engrossed in the movie, one is able to connect to the actors acting out and then may experience comic, horror, or heroism. However, the emotion is temporary and does not last once the movie or the drama is over. Thus, these emotions are only felt in certain situations and only when something is presented to us.

Abhinavagupta, among one of the greatest in Indian aesthetics adds the ninth *Rasa sama* (serenity) to these permanent moods, and *santa* (serene) to temporary emotions though *Bharata* recognized only the first eight. *Abhinavagupta* placed *santa* as the highest *Rasa* because of its relation to the state of *moksa*, so that poetic experience may approximate to realization of the Brahman, the ultimate reality. Thus, he provide a link between aesthetics and religion.

According to *Bharata*, *Rasa* arises out of the co-operation and interaction of three factors: “*Vibhava*, *Anubhava*, and *Vyabhicaribhava*”. *Rasas* arise from a combination of the stimulants (*vibhav*), the physical consequents (*anubhav*) the transient emotional states (*vyabhicaribhav*).

Vibhav: Is the understanding that makes representations capable of being sensed or it also creates awareness of what is intend to create by the creator. It can be described as a medium through which an actor evokes emotions. *Vibhava* are of two kinds: *Alambana* and *Udippina*.

Alambana vibhava: it refers to a person or an object through which emotions are manifested and is responsible for awakening the sentiments.

Udippina vibhava: it refers to the circumstances which has enhanced or excited the emotions caused by the stimulant.

Anubhava: *anubhava* expresses emotions through bodily expressions and are reactions of emotions in characters. They are the signs that are seen as the effect of characters acted upon (emotional agitation) emotions. *Anubhava* represents what is to be felt and experienced that makes us possible for us to immerse in the emotions that is evoked by the characters.

There is a very thin line of demarcation between *vibhava* and *anubhava*, yet they cannot be considered same because *vibhava* is the cause and *anubhava* is the consequence. For example, a reaction of painful expression on the face is a definite cause or *vibhava*. Therefore, the physical painful reaction will be *anubhava*, which is external in manifestation.

Vyabharibhava: they are emotions associated with dominant or well defined emotions. An emotion manifests themselves by accompanying the state of mind that appears as external forms indicating a mental state that are posed by the person.

Bharata also refers to *Bhavas* (emotional states), the imitations of emotions that an actor performs, and the *Rasas* that inspire the audience. *Bhavas* explains the importance of *Natyasastra* in the evolution of the theory of art, and the relation between the *Rasas* and *bhavas* as the performers manifest them as a secret art. In Indian aesthetic, *Rasa* is translated as sentiments and *bhava* is the essence of performing art.

This is the background of Indian classical aesthetics. However, if we look at Aurobindo's aesthetic, we can find that he does not consider the classical theories of aesthetic. The classical theory as we have seen, is concerned with *Natya*(drama) and how it is capable of bring out the emotions that is relished by connoisseur.

The work of art, however, according to Aurobindo is not just seeking beauty and relishing the aesthetic experience but seeks something beyond that and tries to find in aesthetics, the old spiritual traditions underlying the work of art. The Indian art has a

unique identity determined by its own cultural tradition and Aurobindo tried to bring that out through the unique spiritual bliss. Aurobindo's aesthetics is directly set within a more spiritual tradition and the highest spiritual bliss is the highest aesthetic enjoyment to him. According to Aurobindo,

“Aesthetics is concerned mainly with beauty, but more generally with *Rasa*, the response of the mind, the vital feeling and the sense to a certain “taste” in things which often may be but is not necessarily a spiritual feeling”. (*Sri Aurobindo, The Complete Works of Aurobindo, 27, Letters on poetry and art*).

Rasa as it is awakes a vital enjoyment of taste, *bhoga* in poet's consciousness. The feeling and experience of the mind's thought are changed. The mind transforms into a larger process by which the memory of the soul contemplates. This is rather a common way to get at something that stand in us, the spiritual being that holds in it universal delight and eternal beauty which we have to realize and work upon to achieve higher truths. A poet takes delight in this and turns our experiences, feelings and thoughts into *ananda*.

Aurobindo based his philosophy on ancient Indian thought and experiences, tried to regenerate, and reshape the lost tradition in aesthetics. He extends his aesthetics to everything in the world and to him pleasure and pain falls within the sphere of aesthetics, in trying to relive the old tradition.

3.5 Art Expression: Aurobindo and Ananda Coomaraswamy

Let us now look how the two expresses art and see whether they are similar or whether they depart from each other. Like any other, inspiration plays a very important role to both Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy. Every artist produces a work

of art through inspiration. What then is the inspiration that the two is talking? Is it just inspiration that makes an artist produce a work of art or can inspiration be something more than that?

To this kind of question, Aurobindo says inspiration comes from above. He has done a wonderful work in believing and exploring the power of inspiration not merely as a theory but a fact of both personal and general creative experience in the field of Indian aesthetics. He believed that inspiration is to be felt within, understood and realized and then work upon it then just simply feeling the experience.

Thus, that which inspires us to produce a beautiful piece of art is as important as the spiritual experience because such inspirations are inwardly felt, which pushes one to realize the inner self and produce something that transcends oneself to a higher level of great importance.

Aurobindo feels art requires inspiration not only for its emergence and perfection, but also for its genuine life. He writes,

“The most important and perfect poetry is written when the original source is able to throw its inspiration pure and undiminished into the vital and there takes its native form and power of speech exactly reproducing the inspiration while the outer consciousness is entirely passive and transmits without alteration what it receives from the godheads of the inner or the superior spaces”. (*Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry, p.291*).

According to Coomaraswamy, an artist first gets the idea of the work of art, which could be either one's own idea or could have come from someone else. In whichever way, one gets the idea; the artist gets the inspiration and produces the work of art.

Thus, the source of inspiration could be from anywhere that gives the artist an idea of what a piece of art could be like after its production.

Coomaraswamy's in-depth study Indian artist and ancient texts led him to conclude that art in India is created not just to serve the ordinary purpose of a beautiful piece of object. However, it had a higher aim than just fulfilling the beautiful but the ultimate aim is to serve the subject of traditional art. To put it in his words, the end aim of art is not aesthetic but rhetoric. That which gives effectiveness to truth is rhetoric.

Thus, inspiration for them is something that does not only inspires to produce art but also should move one to soar up towards the spirit and realizes oneself in the spirit, which is already present in man that needs realization.

Coomaraswamy goes on to say that, art reveals God and his omnipresent beauty because while creating a piece of art, the artist becomes a God himself. Thus, the work of art is the result of human spiritual operation.

It can be seen for the two, art is the result of the spirit, to transform and elevate oneself and attain divine inspiration. Nevertheless, there is no one way to say that an art is an art only when it possesses certain qualities or fulfills certain ends.

There is aesthetic too in all daily objects. For e.g. we see a beautiful flower in the garden every morning and admire the beauty of the flower, which is aesthetic and beautiful but not spiritual. The flower still then is a beautiful flower and it gives enjoyment to the eyes. How then, can we say this is not aesthetic because it is pleasing to the eye? The flower does not become less beautiful though it is not spiritual. So aesthetic is to be often seen and felt in everything and not only in the spirit.

Here, the example relates to *Rasa* theory. Beauty and the beautiful things are to be relished and experienced even in the everyday objects. The scope of relishing beautiful things becomes too narrow when only brought down to spirituality as Aurobindo did.

This lead to the question of how Indian aesthetic connects to spirituality, if arts are visual as well as auditory compositions to bring out the beautiful in things, then how is spirit viewed and understood. The one thing that characterizes Indian art is a unique identity of its own tracing back to its old spiritual practice determined by its cultural traditions. Nevertheless, it can be ask, if aesthetic will not become too narrow when brought down to spirituality. This requires discussion that will be tackled up on later in more detail.

3.6 The Essence of Poetry

We shall again refer to *Natyasastra* and how drama in its form lead to the creation of poetry in classical aesthetics. *Bharata's Natyasastra* is presented in drama form and it saw light in the beginning of Indian aesthetic. Its scope includes the actors and performers, types of characters, *Rasas*, *bhavas* and figures of speech. Thus, *Bharata* defines *Natyasastra* to performing arts and drama; others applied it to poetry as well.

Bharata's main concern was dramaturgy in all its aspects. However, there are a number of commentators such as *Lollata*, *Bhamaha*, *Dandin*, *Anandvardhan* , *Abhinavgupta*, *Mammata* and *Kuntaka* who have enriched aesthetic thought in India.

Bharata rightly holds that:

“There is no art or science, craft or skill, falling outside the purview of *natya* or stage performance.” (*Publications Division, Cultural Leaders of India, Aetheticians. P.4*).

However, among the many commentators it was *Bhamaha* who addressed to formulating the rules of poetry. He took up his task to enthrone “*alamkara*”ⁱ in the place of *Rasa*. He holds that ‘*alamkaras*’ are figures of thought and speech that matters most in poetry and brought *Rasa* under *alamkara*.

Bhamaha is known as the father of *Alamkara* school in Sanskrit poetics and he formulates the rules relating to *alamkara* or beauty in *kavya* or poetry. According to *Bhamaha*,

“Eloquent speech without the poetic gift is as graceless as wealth without good manners, and as night without moonlight.” (*Raghavan. V(ed), Aestheticians, p.10*).

Bhamaha in his treatise ‘*Kavyalamkara*’ discusses the various aspects of poetry laying great stress in *alamkara* that adorns poetry. *AlamkaRasastra*, which literally means ‘science of figure of speech’, continues to unravel the mystery of beauty in poetry. *Bhamaha*’s contemplation of poetry is either for legends and heroes or one that is invented by poet’s own imagination. According to him,

“All poems-from a small poem to a *mahavakya* must be endowed with the vital principle of beauty i.e. *vakrokti* or artful expression. Thus, the definition of the figures of speech as illustrated by *Bhamaha* was highly appreciated. Nothing else by itself can make good poetry in the absence of *vakrokti*”. (*Raghavan. V(ed), Aestheticians, p.10*).

Ananvardhana, another commentator, the author of *Dhvanyaloka*, a treatise on the nature of “aesthetic suggestion” is credited with the creation of *Dhvani* theory. He uses the term ‘*dhvani*’ for his theory of poetic suggestion.

In all good poetry, there is a suggested sense and in fact, it is the soul of poetry. According to *Anandvardhana*,

“Poetry which does not contain any suggested sense cannot be considered a good poetry, however charming the expressed sense may be. The quality of poetry depends on the importance given to the element of suggestion.” (*Seturam, V.S. Indian Aesthetics an introduction, p.288*).

That is why having a good poetry is not enough to arrive at the suggested meaning but the characters and the context are important to arrive at suggested meaning.

Poets must have realized long before *Bharatamuni*, that *Rasa* is the very life of poetry. The Principle of *Rasa* is the very kernel of poetry. When *Vibhava*, *Anubhava* and *Vyabhicarabhava* combine, they produce *Sahrdaya*.

Who is a *sahrdaya*? We cannot qualify a person as having *Sahrdaya* at will. A *Sahrdaya* has taste in poetry and has a sensitive heart. A *sahrdaya* also has close acquaintances with poetical works or dramatic works. A reader who is capable of identifying himself or herself with what is presented; they only are the person who has been called by as ‘*sahrdaya*’ in classical Sanskrit poetics.

Sahrdaya when roughly translated into English would mean a critic with a literary taste. The *sahrdaya* must possess a clean heart that would be able to reflect as clearly as a mirror. For e.g. while watching a movie, if a person gets completely engrossed in the movie then one is able to enjoy and connect with the emotions of love or tragedy being acted in the movie. However, when a spectator does not get engrossed but have in mind criticisms about the movie as to how a person alone is able to kill many or how a person is able to be happy in life without owning anything etc. will not allow one to connect with what needs to be connected.

When the surface of the mind is cleared and free from such thoughts then only it reflects clearly, what is not being disturbed. In much the same way, when we look at a dramatic presentation or read a poem, our mind must be completely fixed on the emotions of the drama or poetry, and should not be disturbed by any other ideas, which are external to the object presented. Such a person with a clean state of mind with a taste in aesthetic relish is a *sahrdaya*. The language of drama or poetry is full of suggestion and a *sahrdaya* must have the capacity to visualize situations to form an aesthetic image.

A poet also experiences an aesthetic mood and then tries to communicate it through language. When a poet tries to bring the experiences in language, they struggle with words and grammar, which is unable for conveying such moods and thus produces a poem that recreates and express feelings of what a poet felt in few words.

The poet's inborn capacity to create something new and out of one's own imagination is creativity in oneself. This creativity is understood in Indian Classical Aesthetic as *Pratibha*.

A poet possesses certain abilities, which allows one to create new things out of one's imagination. One does not just become a poet because not everybody is moved by inspirational moments or because a person does not have the inborn creativity and imagination to create a poem. Thus, a poet should possess certain qualities that differentiate them from the others and *Pratibha* explains the creation of a poem.

A poet is at once who sees and is capable of expressing his or her feelings, endowed with the special power of creating manifold creative imagination due to the power called *Pratibha*. *Pratibha* is a spark in the poem, conveying feelings with the combination of words and things. *Pratibha* is nothing but when roughly translated into English means creative imagination.

Pratibha has a unique feature or power, which is always capable of creating something new. Nevertheless, *Pratibha* is not universal because the poetic spark is not present in all people and does not belong to many. The creative power of *Pratibha* remains in a poet even if he ceases to write poetic substance for a time being, so its result can be inferred only from its effect.

Pratibha is also called the purpose of poetry because with its power, not only the poet raises the meaning of the poem to a very high level but the reader also enters a transcendental world with a view of relishing the ordinary meaning to a transcendental level by the power of *Pratibha*. This is again because the ordinary meaning does not become poetic without *Pratibha*. The ordinary things begin to lead to a new creation when touched by the poetic genius and approaches an aesthetic object. The poet or the artist is of prime importance and the genius *Pratibha* leads to an excellent form in things to enjoy *Rasa* essence.

3.7 The Aesthetic of Aurobindo

Aurobindo also gives a very serious way to poetry and the creativity of poetry. As inspiration plays an important role according to him, the significance of poetry is a contribution towards one's greater life as poetry is the outcome of one's experience and feelings of one's deepest thoughts. It is not just the experience that one comes across but also the quality of emotions and certain feelings that one feels inside pours out as poetry.

Now, the poet in his or her creative ways creates poetry and connects us to a higher thinking that elevates our mind into experiencing new thoughts. Thus, a poet best seizes the inner truth with poetic substance with the power to move the other into the poet's world.

The purpose of poetry we can say is to communicate our feelings, emotions and state of mind, just as poetry is not imagination and impression of experiences but understanding of feelings.

The aim of poetry is to communicate a significant experience that can deepen our sense of thinking and experience creatively and imaginatively with an inspirational creativity giving incandescent enjoyment both to the reader and to the poet. It involves emotions and poetry in its highest forms comes by employing metaphor, similes and rhythm.

Aurobindo has derived symbols from his astounding and unparalleled Vedic scholarship and his thoughts and deeds were expression of his undaunted belief in Indian spirituality.

Aurobindo, a seer and a poet mainly aimed to revive the ancient Indian culture. It echoed in his writings based on the spiritual foundational text that seeks to elevate us through poetry. It also aims to lead us to the level of transcendence. In his poetics, a poet is thus, expected to transmute experiences into inner vision. He has used the ancient myth ‘*Savitri*’ as a creative metaphor, symbol and an instrument reflecting the nature of spiritual experiences revealing a conquest of the divine. Aurobindo puts the art expression and beauty forward in a spiritual context. Thus, his aesthetic is set within a more spiritual realm and defines poetry as the ‘rhythmic voice of life’.

“Poetry is the rhythmic voice of life, but it is one of the inner and not one of the surface voices. And the more of this inner truth of his function the poet brings out in his work, the greater is his creation”. (*Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry, p.217*)

The experience of the poet carries far beyond the personal self and expresses the experienced intuitive truth, which is real and dynamic. He gives poetry the highest

level of aesthetic expression because the poet in a spiritual realization is more real in nature.

According to Aurobindo, aesthetic experience liberates human spirit from its bondage and soars towards the realization of the spirit that is its destination. Aesthetic experience of the highest level can elevate us from the mundane world as he sees, but he also believes that a poet only possessing the quality of a seer can enjoy aesthetic experience.

The art of beauty gives us the pleasure to enjoy a good poetry, a wonderful painting, a good music or movie etc. and all these moves us to a higher contentment. Nevertheless, Aurobindo finds delight in poetry and his poetry is dominated by his experiences in the spiritual sphere.

He gives poetry a very high status and calls it '*mantra* of the Real'. By this, he means that poetry must transcend the earth to bring spirituality by Divine truth. Concerning this, his poetry is founded on his deeply felt intuition and spiritual experiences.

Aurobindo identifies *mantra*, as special peculiar poetry that is characterized by profound creativity and spiritual experiences. *Mantra* is chanted in meditation but he gave a unique interpretation of *mantra*. He uses the Sanskrit word '*mantra*', which he says does not have an equal interpretation in English as it connotes both incantation and magic. Sri Aurobindo applies *mantra* to a kind of poetic creativity that conveys to us the truth of things. He says,

“The *mantra* is a direct and most heightened and intense and most divinely burdened rhythmic word which embodies an intuitive and revelatory inspiration and ensouls the mind with sight and presence of the very self,

the inmost reality of things.” (*Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry 1997 edition, p.218*).

A question can be posed, if every poetry that is produced with the deepest feelings of the poet be called poetry of *mantra*, can a poet be called to have expressed the deepest thoughts, precisely and potently to convey the work of creation?

The essence and nature of *mantra* in poetry is different and *mantra* he says surges from the soul of a seer. Then can we call the deep thoughts and feelings that are not spiritual but have moved a poet to produce poetry as *mantra*? Not all that moves a poet can be *mantra* and this question requires further explanation, which will be tackled upon later. For Aurobindo,

“Poetry is *mantra* only when it is the voice of the inmost truth and is couched in the highest power of the very rhythm and speech of that truth”. (*Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry, p.194*).

Inspiration plays a phenomenal part in the dynamics of Aurobindo’s poetic creation. This power of inspiration took the initiative in shaping his creation of spiritual inspiration. The inspiration he receives is not ordinary inspiration but divine inspiration that flows within and transforms him.

In the Divine inspiration, the poet is essentially a spiritual being and his poetics transcends the physical and mental world. Aurobindo gets Divine inspiration from above, which he submit to it and the spiritual awakening in him pours out spiritual substances of poetry.

He thus classifies the uses of art in three ways: first is purely aesthetic, second is intellectual or educative and third is the highest – the spiritual. The aesthetics of

Aurobindo lands in the third and the highest level through which he tries to transform the entire humanity towards the spirit.

In India, art was never divorced from religion and in the same way; aesthetics and spiritual concepts go hand in hand. It is not pleasure that is sought but bliss and *Ananda* forms the basis of Indian aesthetic. Aurobindo's contribution in Indian aesthetic and spirituality is an organized whole experience to the perception of poetry; he termed spiritual perception of poetry as overhead aesthesis leading to the formation of *Mantra*.

The poetry of *mantra* is created in the consciousness belonging to the level of Overmind. The Overmind is primarily spiritual and higher than the mental mind. Aesthetic belongs to our mental capacity, so that all depends upon it may be reduced to the theory of 'Art for Art's sake'.

However, a mind that rises above and surpasses the ordinary mind takes a stand on spirituality and essentially transforms all that is into eternal beauty on the level of the spirit. The mind on a spiritual foundation is concerned rather with truth or knowledge of truth that goes beyond and not beauty and aesthetics.

The purpose of Overmind is not to deal with limited aesthetics but presents a greater and wider thought revealing the truth of spirit without which the transcendence of spirit is not observed. Thus, to appreciate the element of great poetry or Overhead poetry is to have a mind more intense than the ordinary mind, which Aurobindo gives the place of Overhead poetry.

In order for poetry to be more *mantric* the inspiration has to come from the Overmind level. His epic '*Savitri*' is written from the Overmind and intuitive level where poetry becomes *mantra*. The deep *mantric* words have spiritual connotations that can be understood and grasped only by those who understand the deeper

meaning of truth through experience. For example the opening lines of *Savitri* is *mantric*:

“It was the hour before the Gods awake.
Across the path of divine Event
The huge foreboding mind of night alone
In her unlit temple of eternity,
Lay stretched immobile upon Silence’ marge”.
(*Aurobindo, Savitri, A Legend and a symbol*,
p.1, Third Edition 1970).

These lines indicate a meditated mind of quietude. There is a path of divine event and an eternity not bound by space and time and there is silence. This kind of silence can also be referred to as the ninth kind of *Rasa* known as quietism. Quietism is a state where happiness arises from a state of rest that is different from the transitory state of time.

Mantra is thus rhythmic poetry that descends from higher level of consciousness that is made available to common people to soar upwards in reaching higher consciousness through *mantra*.

According to Aurobindo, poetry, which he also says is the highest level of aesthetic expression, should not talk about truth, other abstract concepts or mere statements and facts or that teaches the process of reaching God. However, inspired and intuitive poetry should reveal truth and give the philosophy of life with its appeal more towards the soul than the intellect.

The Overmind aesthesis of Aurobindo nevertheless is more concerned with truth than it is with beauty and delight. Aurobindo in ‘The Future Poetry’ in detail explores truth in length as he discusses the great poetry of the spiritual and the

experienced. His 'Future Poetry' would have truth as its essential element, as poetry has to have truth and life touched by the spirit. He observes that delight and beauty are intrinsic to things beyond experience.

In Ancient India, art expresses the inner selves and deeper truths, which seems to have lost down the ages. Therefore, delight and beauty in things, which he sees, catches the eye and attention of a poet that should have in its deliverance and relevance an impact that may arouse higher truths, wonder, beauty and delight. The distinct vision that a poet is able to see beyond makes them a poet and the genuineness and moment of inspiration leads a poet to express eternal truth and beauty.

Aurobindo allowed himself to this inspiration and created poetry that not only expresses the deep feeling, emotions and truth but also the delight of the spirit. Poetry becomes a revelation for him and he consciously becomes an instrument of inspiration led by his poetic genius creating grandeur in poetry and spirit.

To him, a spiritual force is the poetry of the future, he sees the expression of spirit in poetry which is the most profound and inherent quality of poetry because spirit is the only real self. When spirit takes over the poet and poetry, the highest form of beauty and delight is possible and such is the aim of Aurobindo, trying to bring down Divine life on earth and its manifestation not only for himself but also to all humankind. He writes,

“A poetry born direct from and full of the power of the spirit and therefore a largest and a deepest self-expression of the soul and mind of the race is that for which we are seeking and of which the most profound tendencies of the creative mind seem to me

in trivial”. (*Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry, p. 268*).

He sees ‘*Savitri*’ as a spiritual journey into reaching the higher level of consciousness. Poetry in whichever way it presents will have spiritual force behind and would be elevated. In ‘*Savitri*’, the vision of truth delineates in poetry and not imagination nor thought. His vision and ascension of consciousness of mind that goes from lower to the higher level, brings down divine on earth can be seen in his lines where he writes:

“Out of the voiceless mystery of the past
In a present ignorant of forgotten bonds
These spirits meet upon the roads of Time.
Yet in their heart their secret conscious selves
At once grew aware of each other warned
By the first call of delightful voice
And a first vision of a destined face”.

(*Aurobindo, Savitri, A Legend and a symbol, p.400, Third Edition 1970*).

These are lines indicating a relation between love and death. The tale of *Savitri* and *Satyavan* that had fascinated Aurobindo so much that his epic *Savitri* is based on this story along the theme that love conquers death. *Savitri* fights against mortality that fate has destined for her husband *Satyavan*. However, true love conquers all and she brings back his soul, while *Yama* the God of Death was impressed not only by

Savitri's love and devotion for her husband but also her intellect and wills to give the boon to bring back *Satyavan* to life.

In this story, the form of *Savitri's* struggle raises her to loftiness and makes her a savior to her men. In all these, true love proves to be a power and a force that conquers everything. She symbolizes the power of love, which raises human to the Divine level and achieves the impossible.

Savitri also symbolizes that when human gathers all the forces, human spirit can do wonders. *Savitri*, as presented in the epic is a great world-mother, bold and fearless and determined to change the fate of man and thus this epic moves beyond tragedy with a prelude to new order with the power to bring down divine upon earth.

The lines of Savitri poem are *mantric*, receive inspiration from the higher level of consciousness and rhythm came and took its shape automatically. Thus, *mantra* descends from Overmind consciousness and is rhythmic poetry helping man to tend upwards towards the spirit. An expression of such level of poetry that expresses the inmost truth connected to the spirit is exemplified in his zenith achievement as a poet in his epic "*Savitri*" in abundance.

It should be remembered that the poetry of *mantra* comes from above the ordinary mental mind, the Overmind, which is superhuman consciousness and that would mean an elevation. It is also not possible to reach the highest level of mind, which he calls the Supermind without going through the intervening stages of four lower consciousness's.

Thus, it is no doubt that the poetry that comes from the higher level of consciousness has truth of spiritual thought that comes by innermost spiritual touch concerned with the transformation of human leading towards the divine.

Aurobindo also brings in the idea of supernatural in his poetics. Supernatural experiences are that experience that moves us away from our pain, miseries and sadness of worldly life. In a supernatural experience, we find ourselves in a realm of happiness and contentment that gives a different feeling for the self. We are no more attached to anxieties. It is a state of mind where everything will seem beautiful. His lines of supernatural can be found in his lines of *Savitri* where he writes:

“The son of God born as the son of man
Has drunk the bitter cup, owned Godhead’s debt
The debt the eternal owes to the fallen kind
His will was bound to death and struggling life...
He has signed salvation’s testament with his blood...
It is finished, the dread mysterious sacrifice.
Offered by God’s martyred body for the world”. (*Sri Aurobindo, Savitri, p.504*).

The son of God that drank the bitter cup had also experienced pain in the world. It pained him to shed his blood but remembering that will give eternal life, he owes to the fallen kind. But he experienced supernatural experience for he has signed salvation’s testament with his blood.

This is the aim of Aurobindo’s aesthetics, where he holds a promise to develop greater beauty in poetic art in the future, which can justify the pivotal role played by great poetry. Great poetry to him is the *mantra* of the real. He maintains,

“The *mantra* that I have tried to describe it in
The Future Poetry is a word of power and light

that comes from the Overmind inspiration or from some very high plane of Intuition.” (*Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry, Letters on Poetry, Literature and art, p.369-370*).

He also maintained that the characteristic of *mantra* is a language that conveys more than what the world seem to indicate in the mere surface. It is born out of the infinite and reveals fundamental and original consciousness, which is greater than the mental, vital or physical.

To appreciate poetry, Aurobindo gives the parameter by which Overhead or Overmind poetry comes. Unlike some other aestheticians who seek beauty and pleasure in aesthetics, he gives an entirely new dimension to appreciate poetry and art. He gives aesthetic a spiritual aspect and depth to elevate people. This is his contribution to art. However, whether or not one has been elevated is a concern that defines his goal of aesthetics. Therefore, his contribution of aesthetic will be considered and discussed in the next chapter.

3.8 The Aesthetic of Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy

Coomaraswamy an interpreter of Indian art bears upon the study of Indian aesthetics and the traditional values of India. He holds that Indian aesthetic has religious values that were transcendental and in respect of his study and understanding like Aurobindo, reaches the most refined essence of Indian art. He also maintains that aesthetic experience can rise above reason and reaches the spirit because it reveals reality that endures spiritual unity.

The starting point of Coomaraswamy’s speculation is man. In Ceylon, his life took a different turn when he witnessed that the art and crafts of his place are degrading due to the industrial west and their social and spiritual life being denationalized that is affecting the vision of the youths.

He also very much like Aurobindo felt the need to revive the surviving culture of Ceylon to bring in the understanding that can balance the culture. He in fact succeeded so much that he became a champion and a pioneer interpreter of Indian art.

The philosophy of Coomaraswamy is centered in aesthetic experience. The similarities between Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy can be seen where both seeks to work for the progress of Indian culture, in fact to save what is losing out of the culture and bring its spiritual past glory that can revive man not as an individual being but the entire humanity.

Coomaraswamy, very much like Aurobindo also viewed art to be spiritualistic. He finds in Indian culture an unmistakable presence of the spirit and it was his aim to free human spirit. He sees behind all art, culture and civilization that there is one universal spirit, which binds everything as one that bestows beauty upon life.

“The heart and essence of Indian experience, Coomaraswamy says is to be found in a constant intuition”. (*Ananda Coomaraswamy, Dance of Shiva, p.22*).

As mentioned earlier, an artist according to him first gets the idea of an artwork that is either one's own idea or that comes from someone else through whom they later get inspiration and produces the work of art.

Before creation, the artist must choose what they want to create. This is a choice as an artist's responsibility because he makes a distinction between artist as a man and an artist who is under the compulsion of art. An artist must know oneself as a knowing creating subject, considering the mental object that must imitate in their material art.

To Coomaraswamy, an art becomes meaningless when it fails to serve either an individual or the community. This is because he believes that only useful art can reveal the important characteristics in art.

An artist must sometimes achieve artistic creation through intuition or inspiration. The revelation of such creation in India is considered revelation of higher inner reality or truths which an artist must seek to perceive. Coomaraswamy says contemplation raises our level of reference from the empirical to the ideal, from observation to vision, from auditory sensation to audition. This contemplation is nothing but method of yoga, which helps reach the state of being where there will be no longer any distinction between the subject and object or the knower and the known. Thus, the mental concentration enables to achieve unity of consciousness.

An artist, thus receive inspiration from above without which it is clear that a man cannot become an artist. The inspiration here is what inspires man to make themselves an instrument. The body and the mind are instruments. Inspiration cannot proceed from ego but unlike imagination where ideas first form an image of a thing or in an imitable form, inspiration is supernatural influence enabling to receive supernatural truths. We are thus not inspired by sense perceptions but inspiration from above that is the work of the spirit.

Coomaraswamy also gives a spiritual interpretation to Indian art and symbols. It is evident that art or symbol communicates truth that belongs to the spirit apprehended by the spiritual vision. A true artist tries not to extract beauty but reveal life, truth and reality within unreality. There are hindrances but true art transcends and releases man's confusion to seek truth. Thus, Indian art expresses spirituality upon earthly beauty that will convince the mind to understanding the divine.

He gives a good exposition to the symbol of *Nataraja* in his book 'The Dance of Shiva'. In his thought, Shiva is a lord of dancers or king of actors and Shiva dancing is treated as most beautiful symbol his aesthetic view.

The *Nataraja* is one great creation of Indian art signifying the activities of god that are represented through the dance of Shiva. Of the many difference dances of Shiva he talks about three that are significant. The first is an evening dance in the Himalayas, with the divine chorus described as follows in the *Shiva pradosh stotra*;

“Place in the mother of the Three roles upon a golden throne, studded with precious gems, *shulapani* dances on the heights of *kailasa*, and all the gods are gather round Him:

“*Sarsvati* plays on the *vina*, Indira on the flute, Brahma holds the time-marking Cymbals, *Laxmi* begins a song, Vishnu place on the drum, and all the gods stand round about:

“*Gandharvas*, *Yakshas*, *Patagas*, *Uragas*, *Suddhas*, *Sadhya*s, *Vidyadharas*, *Amaras*, *Apsaras*, and all the being dwelling in the three worlds assembled there to witness the celestial dance and hear the music of the divine choir at hour of twilight.” (*Ananda Coomaraswamy, The dance of shiva*, p. 67).

The second dance of Shiva is called Tandava. The Tamasic nature of Shiva is the aspect of this dance. It is performed in cemeteries and burning grounds where Shiva,

usually in ten armed form, dances widely with Devi, accompanied by troops of capering imps. The dance performed in burning ground here refers not to the place where earthly bodies are cremated but where egos are destroyed and laid desolate that ultimately signifies a state where delusion are burnt and its existence ends.

The third dance is the Nadanta dance. This dance is seen before the assembly (Sabha) in the golden hall of Chidambaram or Tillai, the center of the universe. This dance forms the copper figure of Shri Nataraja in the south. The real meaning of the dance may be summarized as follows:

“In the forest of Tarajan dwelt multitudes of heretical rishis, following of the Mimamsa. Thither proceeded Shiva to confute them, accompanied by Vishnu disguised as a beautiful woman, and Anti-sheshan. The rishis were at first led to violent dispute amongst themselves, but their anger was soon directed against Shiva, and they endeavored to destroy him by means of incantations”. (*Ananda Coomaraswamy, The Dance of Shiva, p.68-69*).

The sages produced a monstrous serpent but Shiva seized it and wreathed around his neck like a garland. In an artificial fire, a fierce tiger was created but Shiva seized that too and ripped off its skin with his little fire and like a silken cloth, he wrapped it around himself. Shiva then began to dance, but the last monster, ‘*Mulayaka*,’ in the shape of a malignant dwarf rushed upon him. The God but pressed the tip of his foot and break its back that it writhed on the ground. Then Shiva resumed the dance witnessed by rishis and gods. In this way Shiva’s dances are represented in a beautiful way and an aesthetic sense are brought out in a way that will enlighten aesthetic delight.

Coomaraswamy creates an understanding that Indian art has its own worth and identity. He plays an important part in creating awareness to look at ourselves in the light of our own eyes and interpreted Indian art and culture in the framework of perennial philosophy (*philosophia perennes*). Like Sri Aurobindo, he wanted art to serve to both physical and spiritual needs of men or in other words, he attempts to explore the soul of Indian art through perennial philosophy. There is no art in its totality that is non-religious but in any modes of art, be it poetry, music, painting or sculpture, there is some sort of religious vehemence signifying spiritual beauty in which lies the implications of perennial philosophy.

“The central idea of perennial philosophy is that Divine Truth is one, timeless and universal and that the different religions are but different languages expressing that one truth”. (*William Stoddart, Remembering in a World of Forgetting Thoughts on Tradition and Postmodernis*,. p. 51-52).

As this single truth reverberates through all times and places in human history, it is manifested in different civilizations. Such a view can be said to be an acceptance to both Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy since both strives towards achieving a divine truth that is one which can be attained in the spirit.

A work of art has spiritual significance since it expresses an inner truth but art becomes insignificant when it fails to express a proposition. However, an art becomes rhetorical when it expresses an opinion or a thesis as Coomaraswamy says art should be rhetoric. Art must be rhetoric because it is in itself a kind of knowledge.

By “rhetoric”, we mean, with Plato and Aristotle, “the art of giving effectiveness to truth”. (*Ananda Coomaraswamy, Figures of Speech, p.10*).

A connoisseur of art, Coomaraswamy believed that poets and artists make a nation. His mission of enabling people to understanding the higher truths of life let him to the ultimate source of all things, God. He looked at a harmonious vision of life and in fact, through a mutual respect of religion, cultural conflicts and religion can be solved by means of art because art in all its form speaks the universal language of the spirit. This is his mission where he tries to make people understand higher and divine truths.

3.9 A Complementary of Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy’s Spiritual Aesthetic

The aesthetics of Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy complement each other in the nature that they are both spiritual. Coomaraswamy discovered the efficacy of art that underlies in all forms of art and thereby bringing new redirections and new spiritual reflections in art. The visual art, he intends to say are the tangible means of art conveying the deeper realities of life. In Indian aesthetics, art is considered a path for the realization of ultimate truth and his interpretation of art is a representation of things in a spiritual light. Art functions in a higher level of his being, in the spirit. His exposition of beauty entails the deeper reality that is to be felt and understood. Indian art in its creation and purpose is spiritual in nature according to Coomaraswamy.

A work of art as an object of art is not valuable for its own sake but as a means of communicating truths. According to Coomaraswamy, beauty belongs only to the spirit and can be seized only by spiritual vision. Thus, the true aim of life will be to reveal life within. Therefore, when this is realized, we can realize the divine idea within us.

The heart and essence of India experience, Coomaraswamy says,

“Is to be found in a constant intuition of the unity of all life, and the instinctive, ineradicable conviction that the recognition of this unity is the highest good and the uttermost freedom”. (*Ananda Coomaraswamy, Dance of Shiva, p.22*).

Therefore, in Indian art a beautiful artwork can serve to the release of the spirit. He writes, aesthetic experience is,

“An inscrutable and uncaused spiritual activity, that is virtually ever present and potentially realizable, but not possible to be realized unless and until all affective and mental barriers have been resolved, all knots of the heart undone, and it is necessarily admitted that the experience arises in relation to some specific representation”. (*Ananda Coomaraswamy, The Transformation of Nature in Art, p.51*).

Aurobindo also claims that aesthetic and aesthetic experiences are largely mystical and elevated experiences. The lines of his epic poem *savitri* are, he would say is spiritual. The expressions of his poem are personal mystical experiences.

Aurobindo is not trying to romanticize poetry but he is in search of a truth that can give realization to the soul to serve people through spiritual endeavors. The spiritual achievement and spiritual experiences cannot be achieved through a mental belief because that will be a considerable value of mind. He says the spiritual evolution

begins with a spiritual realization although in the mental mind. Therefore, the essence of spirituality is to awaken the inner reality of our being.

Coomaraswamy and Aurobindo had evidently worked on enriching human life with an aim of achieving spiritual goals. They had worked on a message of Indian aesthetic focusing on the characteristics of Indian art that echoes in the heart of people expressing divine delight. They recognized the western forces upon the motherland and highlight Indian art in true perspective with an art in spirit playing an important role in appreciating the beautiful. It is the inner truth that expresses the character of aesthetics, an end both agrees.

In expressing art, Aurobindo regards ‘*Rasa*’ as the standpoint of Indian aesthetics with a nature of *Ananda* and gives a spiritual definition to *Rasa*.

The theory of *Rasa* also appealed Coomaraswamy and he defines *Rasa* as

“Aesthetic quality and the spirit of its operation is developed in various treatises dealing with Sanskrit poetry and drama”.
(James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, p.29).

The theory of *Rasa* that applies to drama in Indian art was undertaken by them and applies it to other fields of art as well as poetry, giving a spiritual lining different from others. It can be summed that their study had revealed deep understanding of Indian aesthetics introducing into a world-view allowing deepest thoughts to be permeated systematizing the foundation of art and its approach that soars and goes beyond the mundane level and reaches perfection.

There are beautiful arts that cannot be detached from our practical life that serves as the sole function of utility purpose, for entertainment or for pleasure, yet in Indian

art, we cannot eliminate the spiritual element as Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy had expounded.

3.10 Summary

The spiritual aesthetics of Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy however is not free from doubt and certain questions can be raised here i.e. whether India has distinctions in art like Kant or it can have only one type of aesthetic i.e. spirituality. There are more important questions to consider, whether India can be called to have aesthetic without spirituality? By bringing in spirituality, have they raised the question of aesthetic or distort it and how can non- spiritual art be appreciated. These are problems central to their vision of aesthetics that will be discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4

A CRITICAL ASSESSTMENT OF AUROBINDO'S
PHILOSOPHY OF SPIRITUALITY

4.1 Introduction

Aurobindo's detailed theories of man and his destiny of divine life was his central and grand vision. This was a unique vision. However, how are we going to understand and assess his vision of the divine constitute the central focus of this chapter.

It also consists in the demarcation of whether or not his theories was able to stand the criticism and questions pertaining to his aim of achieving the divine truth or to some extent has remained as a vision. Hence, his vision will be addressed in question, which can serve as a valuable guidance obtained from his metaphysics, mysticism, nationalism and his role as a spiritual leader. Thus, this chapter will look into the questions that render importance and stand to the need of discussion in the philosophy of Aurobindo.

4.2 Politics

It will be appropriate to highlight again here Aurobindo's unique spiritual contribution to politics to better understand the meaning of his spiritual politics. In the political career, the call for freedom was his first political cry. The motto of his politics lies in the advancement of Indians to identify its true potential so it can have complete independence and freedom.

This is how, Aurobindo with his unique idea related spirituality to politics. According to Aurobindo, spirituality stood as the backbone of his political ideas. His idea of spirituality in politics is an attempt of complete independence that will enable to achieve divine life on earth and this is his spiritual aim of politics. In this way, he took politics in a different direction giving a spiritual touch unlike the others. However, apart from this aim in politics, his larger goal was to divinize and spiritualize everything. In trying to achieve his goal, he first searched for a way to connect politics and spirituality and later tried to spiritualize everything.

The goal of Aurobindo's freedom is not an individual freedom but aims to free the whole humankind. His aim in connecting politics to spirituality is not only to achieve political freedom but also spiritual freedom. Aurobindo believed the freedom of an individual including spirituality would lead each one to achieve inner freedom. Thus, the aim to exercise one's own freedom remained a sole aim, which can allow divine manifestation.

A question can be asked here, how is he trying to solve the problem of nationalism through spirituality and by bringing spirituality in to politics, has he achieved what he aimed for his people? Nationalism, as it is tries to solve problems of the state and thus promotes self-governance over its homeland. This is exactly what Aurobindo is trying to achieve. Let us take the example of Zionism here. Zionism as a nationalist movement had adopted the re-establishment and support for a Jewish state in the

historic land of Israel. Zionists believe in Judaism as a nationality as well as a religion and they deserve to be free in their own homeland of Israel. This brought back the Jews to Israel in the first place and thus establishes the state of Israel.

In the same way, in order for India to be free, Aurobindo wants India to organize itself first so that it will be able to maintain its freedom. He believed that when India is free from its foreign rulers, rise out of material existence to a higher truth, then his aim of spiritualizing can be conquered, and the minds of the people can be swerved in working towards the country's freedom and establish spirituality. This had led him to the spirit of nationalism, which he professes that his nationalism is not political but spiritual.

How has he tried to achieve his goal of spiritual nationalism? Aurobindo says, a group of men who can come together and give up everything for their country could instill the need of a spiritual revival. This can also stir a spiritual movement in the hearts of the people.

For Aurobindo a religious aspiration will manifest itself in the divine and it will drive towards perfection in the search of truth. Hence, the progress of nationalism to free India when taken religiously could strive for the progress of nationalism to achieve the desired goal. He is making it clear that his nationalism is not for power or fame but to work towards spirituality.

In the context of nationalism, Aurobindo said the movement of nationalism is a religion and not guided by self-interest. He also said we are trying to live in the religion of national movement by which we are trying to realize God in our countrymen and in the nation. Some are trying consciously, while others are unconscious of it trying to live not for our own interest but to work for others and the country.

Aurobindo was able to ingrain in the heart of the youths that if the national movement is followed religiously then it could free Indians from foreign shackles and the country's problem of nationalism could be achieved. However, after the political movement started, his realization that the country's freedom could be achieved by the realization of India's spiritual glory led him to the search of the spirit by withdrawing from active politics. This took a turn of him becoming a mystic and the continuation of his political movement ended.

In trying to bring spirituality into politics as discussed in second chapter, Aurobindo had also brought about Indian culture and explains what it means to be called the spirit of India.

4.3 Culture

The dominant spiritual culture of ancient India was the soul of its culture but questions can be asked here; how the distinguishing spiritual culture of India can amaze the rest of the world and represent itself as an ideal spiritual society? How did they contribute to the world as India of spirituality?

To answer the above questions, it would be appropriate to consider an understanding of what spiritual culture is. A spiritual culture is different from material culture and it can be defined as a culture dominated by spirituality. Indian culture is spiritual and in a spiritual culture, the society can be found to be more spiritual oriented where their search of spirituality traces to religion or to an embodied consciousness.

A spiritual culture like India is rooted in the ancient traditions of spirituality. This old tradition of India is nothing but spirituality rooted in Hinduism, where rishis, saints and yogis were the spiritual leaders who were the guiding force to attaining spirituality. If spirituality is rooted in Hinduism, then we can say what distinguishes the Indian spiritual culture is their religion. Their religious spiritual culture, with which Aurobindo wants India to take the lead of the world, would then become

contradictory because he aims Hinduism to take the lead of the world. However, Aurobindo himself declares that he is not considering any religion to fulfill his aim.

According believes that an opening of spiritual experience is a demand of individuals from religion. A definite light of guidance and a communion with God is the promise of a hereafter means of a happy supra-terrestrial future can be met based on a sectarian cult or creedal belief. However, the wider purpose of spiritual evolution is to turn man into a spiritual being. Religion, here serves the means of pointing the efforts and ideals in providing the direction with a possibility of taking a way towards a spiritual evolution.

Aurobindo also says,

A religion which is itself a congeries of religions and which at the same time provides each man with his own turn of inner experience, would be the most in consonance with this purpose of Nature: it would be a rich nursery of spiritual growth and flowering, a vast multiform school of the soul's discipline, endeavor, self-realization". (*Sri Aurobindo, The Life Divine: Art of Living, p.906*).

These lines on religion say that Aurobindo's search of truth is spiritual but he does not aim to reach truth through religious approach. Aurobindo wanted the mind's ignorance to grow in the light and guidance towards complete consciousness of the spirit and self-knowledge, so that the errors committed by religion become indispensable for realization. His concern that the external forces may put an end to the spiritual culture of India also led him to the search of truth that was spiritual which belongs to India. He felt the need to revive ancient India because he says,

“Indian culture recognizes the spirit as the truth of
our being and our life as a growth and evolution of

the spirit. It sees the Eternal, the Infinite, the Supreme, the All; it sees this as the secret highest self of all, this is what it calls God, the Permanent, the Real, and it sees man as a soul and power of this being of God in nature". (*Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture, p. 156*).

We can find that Aurobindo wants to go beyond religion, rituals, practices etc. but even then, his spirituality is inseparable from Hinduism. Though he says, his aim is not to be achieved through religion, it is rooted in Hinduism. His idea of spirituality is therefore not universal but a Hindu-spirituality.

The concept of Aurobindo's cultural transcendence is developed in a spiritual level. Aurobindo was not interested in a society of culture and ethics; rather he seeks the supra-rational side of man in society as his final aim. His aim is to build a spiritual society, of which he says,

"The true and full spiritual aim in society will regard man not as a mind, a life and body, but as a soul incarnated for a divine fulfillment upon earth, not only in heavens beyond, which after all it need not have left if it had no divine business here in the world of physical, vital and mental nature". (*Sri Aurobindo, The Human Cycle, p. 227*).

It can be seen in these lines that a spiritualized individual in a spiritual society is regarded as an instrument of the soul for a diviner purpose. However, is it possible to build a society without culture that defines them, communicates and relate to one another that give meaning to our existence and only stand on spirituality? Culture carries the ethical values, which at the societal level forms the basis of what serves to

distinguish between moral and immoral, good and bad etc. There can be no society without the aspect of culture. However, the supra-rational side of man, which Aurobindo is talking about, is a spiritual man in the society. This could lead to the question if spiritual man alone can build a society. Individuals and groups of people conglomerating build society and relation that is a sum of all human relations. Culture is always about interpreting or favoring one culture over the other and cultural questions cannot be avoided. Let us take an example of a heterogeneous society like India. In India different diverse culture or certain group of people come together and build the society. Therefore, we cannot point or narrow down to one cultural group and say this is Indian culture and it is what makes India. In a similar way, if Aurobindo were interested in a spiritual society without culture, his idea of a spiritual society would remain ideal because spirituals alone cannot build a society. They can be a group but not a whole in society building. A society cannot exist without culture and ethics that keeps changing with the change of time and is never constant.

Aurobindo is a seeker of divine life and divine power in culture that is an approach towards cultural spiritual transcendence. However, the spiritual culture that Aurobindo is trying to establish is dis-satisfactory because one has to become a yogi to achieve this goal. If only a yogi can achieve a spiritual transcendence as dreamt by Aurobindo then his vision of spiritualizing the universal and not the individual would fail because his goal restricts to yogis and does not include other section of people in the society. A yogi is a Hindu concept and if according to him, yogis are the only spiritual beings that can form a spiritual society then it can be said that his dream was to build a Hindu society only. Hence, the spiritual transcendence of Aurobindo does not form an objective in a cultural standpoint of society.

He also wants to build a spiritual society of India that can take the spiritual lead of the world. As a thinker, Aurobindo does not take into account Indian theories as it is

but gives his own interpretation. For example, Rasa connotes in Indian art an aesthetic flavor of any visual that evokes emotion. Aurobindo however defines rasa as a concentrated taste, a spiritual essence of emotion. If he is not interpreting but taking the literal meaning of Indian spirituality to take the lead of the world then it is not possible to agree with him as discussed above, since, his spirituality is rooted in Hinduism and does not consider other religion as spiritual.

Aurobindo believes India is more spiritual than the others are. Nevertheless, the material west is not totally material but considers religion and spirituality rendering it meaning and importance. What Aurobindo assumes is, the east lacks material culture and the west has no spiritual culture. Therefore, he tries to synthesize the two and let east learn material culture from the west and the west, spiritual culture from the east. However, neither west nor east has a synthetic view of material and spiritual culture. It is therefore questionable whether what Aurobindo assumes is right in trying to extend to the west the spiritual culture of India.

He is considering Indian spirituality more spiritual than the western religions are. To consider western religion less spiritual or not spiritual can mean demeaning other religion and culture. In other words, we can say that Aurobindo has failed to see the spirituality in Christianity and based his findings on religiosity. This can be seen in the lines where he says,

“The mentality of the west has cherished the aggressive and quite illogical ideal of a single religion for all mankind, a religion universal by the very force of its narrowness, one set of dogmas, one cult, and one system of ecclesiastical ordinance. That narrow absurdity prances about as the one true religion, which all must accept on peril of persecution by men here and spiritual rejection or

fierce eternal punishment by God in other worlds”.

(*Sri Aurobindo, The Foundations of Indian Culture*,
p.129).

Let us consider here now, in a world of diverse culture and religion, each religion has its own set of moral conducts and beliefs and one may not flexibly adhere to the other system of belief and at the same time, one believes that his/her religion is better than the others. Therefore, what Aurobindo believes that India can take the spiritual lead of the world because he in considering others less spiritual cannot be accepted by religious and spiritual people other than those belonging to the same religion. This gives an understanding that the spiritual lead of Aurobindo's aim may fail since it renders impossibility of one spiritual group taking over the other.

If Aurobindo's aim is considered, it can be understood as a situation of choosing one over the other. Choosing one over the other implies accepting, believing and trusting 'one', while rejecting the others. Aurobindo is here choosing Indian spirituality and culture over other culture. What is so spiritual about India and its culture that he wants to present to others? India, once a land of spirituals and mystics is to him a guiding force, which he believes can lead humankind to become a divine being. The spiritual practice in Aurobindo's thesis aims at evolving the soul manifesting it in to the divine and to contribute to earth a divine life. For this aim, as discussed earlier, he started by bringing spirituality in to politics. His nationalism, as read had spirituality all over because politics for him was a broader aspect for developing spirituality.

Aurobindo's politics has in its totality spiritual overtone. However, the spirituality he is talking about is not the kind of spirituality that one achieves in religion. He says, the spirituality he is talking about is higher than religion. This is because, religion can be a means of attaining spirituality but religion involves faith. Aurobindo is trying to spiritualize humankind without involving religion.

His unique aim and vision of finding the spiritual truth is to reach the level of Supermind by intervening through the different levels of consciousness he has given but does not consider religion in his aim of attaining spirituality. This leads to the question if his notion of spirituality and a divine life on earth is devoid of faith. He is not trying to establish a religion or a faith but spirituality not based on any of the two. Thus, when one reaches the highest level of consciousness i.e., the Supermind, the mind then descends to the lower levels of consciousness for a divine manifestation, which is his spiritual goal.

However, it is difficult to explain his spirituality without any attachment to faith and religion just as it is difficult to explain love without any attachment to a person. He may have a goal of liberation for India and at large for humankind, but it will then become difficult to achieve the goal of representing India to the world without a standard method and would fail to spiritualize humankind.

According to Aurobindo, everything is a manifestation of the same thing. His teaching starts from that of Ancient India that behind appearance there is one reality. All beings are united by one spirit and by discipline; one can remove the veil of ignorance and discover the divinity within us to find the true self. He is trying to liberate through the method of evolution that the self-can impelled to grow higher and towards greater perfection. This perfection evolve towards the development of Supermind that will divinize man.

4.4 Divine personification: The Mother.

Aurobindo and The Mother as discussed had the same aim and dream of inner self-development that will discover one self, evolve to higher consciousness for a spiritual and Supramental consciousness to divinize the earth. Now, we will consider if they as spiritual figures could achieve in leading one towards their desired spiritual goal and dream.

The mother clearly states that she does not represent or preach a religion nor is she trying to turn one towards a religion but helping to realize the divine in man. It is interesting to examine here the statement of being not associated or representing any religion but a force to transform human being to divine beings.

She helps one to realize the divine being within and Aurobindo recommends that one should look up on and focus on the Mother's attention to achieve its divine goal. That means he is either regarding Mother as a God or regarding her as a spiritual figure in directing one towards the divine.

Aurobindo explains the purpose of why Mother had to come on to this world. He says that Mother is not intended to rule this world from above, but she herself intended to come down on to this world with a purpose; she came here to solve malfunctions and illnesses. In fact, she (her quality) spread in all the things that exist on the world. However, she even came down on to the earth personally as well. She came down here to wipe away the darkness and bring light, to defeat falsehood and error with the armory of truth, to eliminate death with godlike life, to remove pain, sorrow and suffering and fill with her magnificent Ananda. She came here to willingly making herself as un-important but in disguise to show her deep and great love on her children. She made herself open to the assaults backed by darkness and falsehood, agreed to undergo the life cycles of birth and death and willingly submitted herself to the pains and grief and miseries of this world because without which light, joy, truth and eternal life cannot sustain on the earth. This is, as Aurobindo said, a greatest sacrifice of Mother for the good of life in this world.

Aurobindo also sees Mother as a divine force. It is understood that Aurobindo considers the Mother as a mediator directly getting inspiration from the divine or as a super being who is above and superior to ordinary non-spiritual beings. To consider the mother as a divine force is considering her an enlightened one to be looked upon

for spiritual goal. This can be seen in the lines of Aurobindo on the Mother, where he says,

“You have only to aspire to keep yourself open to the Mother, to reject all that is contrary to her will and to let her work in you—doing also all your work for her and in the faith that it is through her force that you can do it. If you remain open in this way, the knowledge and realization will come to you in due course”. (*Sri Aurobindo, Bases of Yoga, p.18*).

To Aurobindo, the mother was an epitome of divine force and spirituality. Therefore, when one is open to the mother, there will be realization of the divine within one that will work for the Supramental consciousness of the mind. He says the mother acts not only in the individuals but in the universe as well. By this, he takes into consideration that in spite of having all the qualities of a divine force, Mother functions in the world to direct what cannot be expressed without her. This is the reason why, Aurobindo opines that, Mother should be considered as a divine force, which came to this world with a purpose of transforming life. Therefore, Mother is a divine force or divine Shakti.

Aurobindo opines that people should listen to the Mother for a spiritual realization. However, it can be asked, in what way is the Mother's teaching unique and different that following her teachings lead one to a divine realization. When we analyze the teachings of the Mother, we can find that the Mother's way of answering the devotees are more through prayers by listening to their wishes and problems, prays for them, and blesses them. For Mother, there is a less conscious and a more conscious life. According to her, when one becomes more conscious in their ordinary life then one becomes spiritual and therefore life becomes spiritual life. In this way, she does not distinguish life between ordinary life and a spiritual life. In this manner, she tries to help teach one to become more conscious of their living, which will lead

them to their spiritual goal. Let us look at some ways in which people accept the Mother in different ways.

“i) Mother is accepted as Divine by those who come here as casual visitors and who occasionally pray to her. ii) Sadhak accepts her and pray to her only for spiritual progress. iii) People accept her as one who would do something because Mother has approved of it. Others would not do something because Mother has disapproved of it”. (*Life and Teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Karmayogin, Undated*).

Some who come to meet the Mother see the Mother in this way. There are still another classification of people who relate to the Mother in a slightly different way such as the sadhaks, visitors and devotees. They look up to the Mother as,

“i) We can accept Mother as one to whom we run in a crisis. This is to accept Mother as our savior. ii) We can accept Mother as one who can give us anything we pray for, provided that our prayer is a right one. iii) We can accept her with the idea that only Mother's solution is needed. If it is not there, I must change. No other solution is possible. I do not need another solution. This implies exclusive reliance on her”. (*Life and Teachings of Sri Aurobindo and the Mother, Karmayogin, Undated*).

Just as mentioned in the points above, visitors, Sadhak and devotees in this way accept the Mother. If this is accepted as the work of the Mother in the ashram, then we can ask the question of how the mother is so different and unique from other

spiritual leaders. Let us take the example of Dalai Lama in Tibetan Buddhism. The Dalai Lama is the spiritual leader and beholds spiritual powers. He is thought to be an enlightened, is given much power, and considered by some as a perfect example of nirvana. In a same manner, we have seen that devotees pray to the Mother for hope, peace and who could offer a solution to their problems by praying to her because she is spiritually enlightened. If we consider them as the same possessing spiritual powers leading devotees to higher truths for a spiritual development (Though Buddhists does not belief in a personal God but believes in rebirth and incarnation and searches for the path of enlightenment through morality, meditation and wisdom) then one can maintain that they are seek by devotees for their spiritual power and are not different. We can then perhaps say that Aurobindo's consideration of the Mother as a divine force working in the world is not unique from other spiritual leaders.

Nevertheless, we can argue that all paths to the Divine require and seek in finding meaning to personal life through faith, reason or religion. This is seeking a divine being that is bigger than our personal self; spirituality or God. This can be one way of understanding God, spirituality etc.

In seeking spirituality in faith, one must have faith but in a religious approach. This faith is a conviction that God is on our side and we do whatever is God's plan for us. In faith, a religious institution and a religious leader plays a pivotal role towards achieving spirituality.

One in faith is often found considering rites, rituals, ceremonies, sacrifices and religious worship as means in realizing the divine being. Thus, when one considers an approach to spirituality through faith, religion and God becomes the center of the goal.

On the other hand, finding meaning of spirituality in reason involves reasoning. We do reasoning by ourselves and search for answers to personal questions of who am I and what is the deeper meaning of life. An understanding of this through reasoning could thus develop spirituality and an understanding of God.

How then is spirituality attained without God? In the case of seeking the big answer of spirituality without considering God and religion, understanding the divine being within becomes the central approach and goal. The aim of seeking spirituality without considering God as divine being fulfills the aim with a realization of the meaningful purpose of life within. Let us consider the definition of self-realization in the lines of Paramahansa Yogananda where he says,

“Self-realization is the knowing-in body, mind and soul-that we are one with the omnipresence of God; that we do not have to pray that it come to us, that we are not merely near it at all times, but that God’s omnipresence is our omnipresence; that we are just as much a part of him now as we ever will be. All we have to do is improve our knowing”. (*Warren Munitz, The Infinite Spark, p.85*).

4.5 Integral Yoga

Yoga traditionally is both physical and spiritual. It is a spiritual development and practice to train the mind and body to become aware, control the senses and meditate leading the mind to a union with God. Thus, yoga means union. It is a union with the divine self or the Infinite spirit.

There are four paths of traditional yoga that aim to attain liberation. Karma-yoga, Bhakti-yoga, Raja-yoga and Jnana-yoga are the four paths that are closely related to each other to renounce worldly relations and search for the beyond by meditation.

The purpose of yoga therefore is to purify the mind and body, to gain control over emotions and mind to self-transform and reach a union with the inner self. *Patanjali* also in his classic work '*Yoga Sutra*' describes yoga as "the progressive quieting of the fluctuations of the mind." He explains how through meditation and practice of detachment, we can stop the feelings and emotional pain to open ourselves to experience the true inner self. This is the practice of yoga.

Aurobindo however brought another path of attaining the divine known as *Integral Yoga*. As discussed earlier, spirituality and the divine being within can be realized through the relation with God in faith and reason. This way one is spiritual in one's way. If the realization of the inner self can be achieved in the practice of yoga, why Aurobindo did brought *Integral Yoga* for the attainment of the divine.

What is *Integral Yoga*? The *Integral Yoga* of Aurobindo synthesizes the three-yoga system of Karma-yoga, Bhakti-yoga and Jnana-yoga. *Integral Yoga* aims to integrate divine consciousness to bring down the Supramental force to transform the mind, life and body. The traditional yoga aims at achieving liberation and transcendence. However, *Integral Yoga* goes beyond liberation to reach the Supramental consciousness and directs towards union of one self with the divine consciousness. As mentioned in the chapter on *Integral Yoga*, his yoga involves the method and practice of work, knowledge and devotion. Let us consider the methods here and determine if *Integral Yoga* has achieved its purpose.

The path of work: The ordinary motive of human beings has to be replaced by spiritual motive when one seeks to find the divine in one's life. A work that is not done for personal desire or for fame but that will work spiritually in the search of the divine is the path of work in yoga. This will enable one to work towards the divine.

The path of Devotion: The principle of devotion aims to use human relations no longer to worldly relations but to the enjoyment of the Supreme Being. This

application of yoga devotion can be used to elevate human emotions to the divine level and spiritualization of human life.

The path of knowledge: The aim of knowledge is to know the divine or the realization of the supreme self. Meditation will open silence or quietude of the mind to realize the divine or the supreme self.

The aim of *Integral Yoga* therefore is not to rise out of the ignorant world for liberation or spiritual perfection of the individual but to realize and bring the Supramental force or the divine force to transform mind, life and body. *Integral Yoga* seeks to give oneself entirely to the divine and its goal is to reach a higher-level of consciousness for a Supramental realization on earth not for an individual but for the entire human race. This is the whole aim of his yoga.

Integral philosophy treats the world as a manifestation of the divine and not an illusion. *Integral Yoga* therefore seeks to transform and divinize the earth. Aurobindo said the divine is already in us that needs realization and through the practice of *Integral Yoga*; one can come to a realization of its purpose. Aurobindo practiced meditation, has self-surrendered, and disciplined himself that realizes the divine being in him. As *Integral Yoga* teaches, one can attain and reach the Divine following the methods of *Integral Yoga* through self-aspiration or self-concentration. The mind goes through different levels of consciousness and reaches the Supermind that will descend down to spiritualize the earth.

As he suggests, one can reach Supermind through the method of meditation working upon the three paths of work, devotion and knowledge. However, it can be asked if *Integral Yoga* has achieved its purpose.

Integral Yoga is a part of his vision for humankind. However, the condition is that, this yoga can be done to the end and achieved only by those showing intense conviction to find the divine in them. Those who lack strictness cannot achieve it

because Aurobindo said the work of this yoga is difficult and too high. To concentrate and call the presence of the mother will transform the consciousness with her force. The concentration will then become strong if the mind is quiet and there will be the beginning of experience. Depending on one's own effort will be a slow process to open up the consciousness but he said if one is receptive to the mother's presence and her powers then they will succeed in establishing a contact with the divine.

Meditation is another means of concentration, which is a way of connecting to the spirit, as Aurobindo suggest above. However, do meditation lead to the spirit at all times.

A spiritualist like Aurobindo and the yogis goes deeper in yoga looking for a path to a spiritual connection, while many others practice yoga for peace from the mental and emotional stress of the world through meditation and seek for the ability to overcome pain. As such, not all seeks a spiritual consciousness through yoga. Meditation as a state of calmness and quietude is practiced for spiritual or religious purpose but is also often practiced as a method for serenity. Therefore, the method of self-concentration or meditation as a method to reach the divine will fail to serve the spiritual purpose for all.

The view of spirituality as expressed by Aurobindo has Hinduism forming a spiritual expression having a legitimate place in spiritual life. Therefore, how can we accept that seeking the divine in constricting to yoga is not Hindu thought? The narrowing down of the divine approach to yoga would mean favoring one path over the many other ways of seeking the divine.

However, taking into account the unique vision of Aurobindo, he can be understood as re-constructing a system of thought, which is creatively trying to develop a new

spiritual path for all. As mentioned above, this new spiritual path is not an ordinary spiritual path but strives to reach the Supermind.

Therefore, the ultimate aim of Aurobindo's *Integral Yoga* is attaining the Supermind or a realization of the divine truth, which is not limited to an individual but for the entire humanity. Yoga as he sees is a way of cultivating the wholeness. This wholeness is the spiritual side of yoga. However, in the broader perspective of looking at spirituality, there can be many ways to realize the divine. The paths to the divine have a broader perspective and divine truths need not be necessarily achieved through yoga.

What he brought is a new way and method of yoga but the question can still be raised as what is there in Aurobindo's teaching that is not in Hindu culture and religion. Aurobindo is concerned about the ancient Indian culture that is dying out due to external forces and he is trying to revive the ancient Hindu culture. Therefore, he can be called a revivalist, a Hindu thinker. The new form of spirituality concerns about the realization of the divine within and to bring on earth a divine life. However, Aurobindo failed to practice his new spirituality without talking about Indian culture. He further extended the understanding of the divine and the search of spirituality in aesthetics as well.

4.6 The Spiritual Aesthetics of Aurobindo

The spiritual aesthetics as Aurobindo seeks is not free from doubt and certain questions could arise regarding his aesthetic concepts. The aesthetics of Aurobindo is not art for art's sake but seeks something more than aesthetic value i.e. spirituality.

Art is claimed to evolve in India with an attempt to bring out the underlying meaning of spirituality. Ancient Indian art in it has a sense of spirituality and not only for art experience. In a similar way, Aurobindo's aesthetic and his view of art focus on how

spiritual experience can be brought in aesthetic experience. The spiritual experience that Aurobindo is seeking here is a realization of the divine in art experience.

Let us consider the meaning of spirituality in aesthetics. How can we call spirituality to qualify for the beautiful in things? A spiritual realization in aesthetics according to Aurobindo consists in the renewal or transformation of emotions that can engender feelings to transcend the material world. If one has to understand the spiritual experience underlying in the whole of Indian art and not its beauty, it will then become difficult for many.

It will then become a concern because Aurobindo's concept of aesthetic will become narrow and restricted in terms of interpreting the meaning and value of art. It also becomes restricted, since his concept of aesthetic experience involves art not to produce judgments of beautiful but rather conditions art to respective spiritual mind to understand the underlying spiritual essence and meaning of Indian art. The understanding of the art experience is subjective. However, to understand the spiritual meaning of art as Aurobindo suggests would require an elevated transcended mind to appreciate the meaning of art.

Just as his *Integral Yoga* can be achieved by those minds, open to the divine, to understand the underlying side of spirituality in Indian art would require an elevated transcended mind. Only few can be said to be truly enlightened. Does that mean art experience is limited to those few? Let us consider an artist here who is rarely known to be enlightened. An artist's inspiration result in art. These inspirations are deep inspirations that communicate human thoughts to the source of things. An inspirational art has a spiritual nature. In this case, an artist becomes a mediator between the receiver and the source.

The underlying fact that answers the issue of spirituality here then will be based on the aesthetic experience of a person. It would mean something like this then; for

Aurobindo a more spiritual person who is able to understand and interpret the spiritual meaning of art becomes a connoisseur of art. However, a person who fails to see and understand the spiritual meaning in Indian art would consider failed to understand Indian art. This will then become a very narrow sided view of Indian aesthetics. This view leads to the question of what are good examples of Indian art. If only the themes of Indian art are considered good, then not only the meaning but also artwork itself becomes restricted. In this restricted sense, Indian art will then become Hindu art. There are numerous ways to consider art and aesthetic experience. Therefore, to reduce aesthetics to spirituality would demean and diminish the many qualities of aesthetic experience.

The narrow view of aesthetic leads to the question of why there is a need of spiritual experience in aesthetic experience. If aesthetic experience itself is an experience of heightened excitement and emotions, then why do we need spiritual experience? Spiritual experience will help us get a deeper understanding of ourselves. It connects one to get a glimpse of the self and of liberation that one seeks in spirituality. Spiritual experience brings awareness and manifestation of something bigger than the self. A spiritual experience thus leaves an understanding or experience regarding truth and greater experience.

What really differentiates aesthetic experience from spiritual experience in aesthetics? Aurobindo says, the experience that we experienced in the ordinary level of mind is aesthetic experience. However, after one reaches the Supermind, the experience one experiences in the level of Supermind becomes spiritual experience because here the mind is elevated to its highest state. Aesthetic experience, thus when spiritualized as well moves us to a deeper understanding of the divine.

The philosophy of beauty and the beautiful has a wide range of appreciation. If considering the beautiful in aesthetics, then art needs to be appreciated in all forms of

art, painting, architecture, poetry and music etc., and not only when it has spiritual meaning underlying in it.

Art is appreciated and pleasing to us not only because it produces the beautiful but because we appreciate the beauty in almost all forms of art in everyday life and objects. This is because art cannot be separated from emotions. The emotion in us allows seeing that which is pleasing to the eye and feel the beautiful things surrounding that elevates us. For e.g. a beautiful painting in the room is not admired only for its beauty but also for the emotions the artists expresses in it. Another example is of a beautiful flower in the garden; the flower is liked not only for its beauty but it produces beauty and gives joy at the same time.

According to Aurobindo,

“There is not only physical beauty in the world-there is moral, intellectual and spiritual beauty too. There are not only aesthetic values but life values, mind values and soul values that enter into soul behind things and beings, the spirit and its powers, which could be subject matter of an art still more rich and deep and abundant in its interest than any of these could be”. (*Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art, 1973 Edition, p. 44*).

There are numerous and countless ways to appreciate beauty and art. In fact, great or good art elevates and gives pleasure. Since all art produces pleasure, there is no one fixed way to say this art is better than the other is. Therefore, we cannot say an aesthetic experience with spiritual experience is better than others because an aesthetic experience itself is an elation other than our ordinary experiences. Aesthetic

experience connects us to beautiful things and a deeper understanding of the beautiful.

Aurobindo pointed out that there are three uses of aesthetic, the lowest and the first use of art is purely aesthetic, second is intellectual, the highest and the third is the spiritual. Aurobindo is trying to bring out this spiritual aesthetic in art. One can stop at the level of aesthetic experience and enjoys it but if spirituality becomes the condition to enjoy aesthetic experience then it becomes complex. Art will then be closed to few only that can experience spiritual experiences through art.

An artist's creating an art may have experienced a higher and elevated experience that inspires to put the experience in an art form. However, they create for an ordinary mind that they can experience it as aesthetic experience. The art is then experienced and appreciated in an ordinary state of mind and the connoisseur of art does not always experience it spiritually.

Art is for everybody and therefore it is universal. Art can be sensual, poetic, spiritual etc. but it is subjective to one's own experience in the sense that a beautiful painting that appeals more to me can be less pleasing to the other or not pleasing at all. Nevertheless, it still qualifies as an art and is appreciated for its beauty. We do not always need a higher level of mind to appreciate art because not all spiritual persons or higher mind can also experience spirituality in art. To draw spiritual experience from art is not possible at all times even for artists and the connoisseur. Therefore, the spiritual aesthetics of Aurobindo does not satisfy the adequacy of his vision of realizing the divine through art. This leads to the question, if his poetry as mantra that expresses the poet's inner deepest thought fulfills his vision in reaching the divine.

Poetry expresses feelings such as ugly, beautiful, imaginary or actual. Poetry was not just poetry or some beautiful lines of feelings for Aurobindo. It was an experience of

spiritual feeling. He formulated poetry that was in search of a creative mind endeavoring to separate beauty in an art form. His poetry brings out his attachment to art leading to a spiritual evolution.

Aurobindo considers,

“Poetry as a mediator between the immaterial and the concrete, the spirit and life.” (*Sri Aurobindo, The Future Poetry, p.205*).

Nevertheless, there is the question of whether his search of an experience that could unite spirit and matter through poetry has come about. The poetry of Aurobindo was best revealed in his epic *savitri*. *Savitri* is mystic poetry that expresses Aurobindo's experience of the spiritual and the possibility of establishing the divine life on earth.

“Aurobindo defines poetry as elusive and unfathomable, he calls it “mantra of the real”. (*Sri Aurobindo, The Future and Letters on Poetry, Literature and Art, 1972 Edition, p.9*).

He considers spiritual experiences most suitable to be recorded in poetry. In fact, his poetry are expressions of his experience and realization of the spiritual experiences. His yogic experiences are thus best expressed in his *savitri*. In this way, his epic *Savitri* expands man's mind towards the spiritual.

Aurobindo formulated his poetry taking it to a transcendental spiritual level that can only be apprehended by few. Nevertheless, we cannot deny his poetry's greatness too. With a great imaginative power and vision in creating his epic *savitri* as an instrument to bring upon divine life on earth, his poetic greatness and art is to be measured in his great vision. In his greatest poetic achievement *Savitri*, he speaks of his expression of vision and experience of all planes of consciousness to transform

life on earth to a divine life. The epic poem *Savitri*, based on the legend of “*Savitri* and *Satyavan*”, a story that “Love conquers death”. This theme is made a basic symbol of his divine life on earth.

Through *savitri*, Aurobindo unveils the greater world of peace and truth. He considers *Savitri*'s win over death by her strong-willed faith as an impact of divine transformation. *Savitri* thus envisages upon earth the light of truth that can win over ignorance. He symbolizes the legend in the following expression as *Satyavan* a soul carrying the divine truth and *Savitri* as the divine word.

Aurobindo says,

“In fact *Savitri* has not been regarded by me as a poem to be written and finished, but as a field of experimentation to see how far poetry could be written...one's own Yogic consciousness and how that could be made creative”. (*Mangesh.V.Nandkarni, The Golden Bridge, the Wonderful Fire an Introduction to Aurobindo's Epic, p.3*).

The yogic experience and consciousness of creating poetry; not for the sake of creating but to express truth cannot be understood by all, as it is mantric. Many critics have tried to find the spiritual thought in Aurobindo's epic *savitri* but each finds in poetry different feelings and may not always find an expression of the spirit.

Aurobindo is a mystic poet and his spiritual experiences and visions are revealed in his mystic poems. To him poetry is heard from the poet's innermost soul. As a mystic, Aurobindo's poetry expresses his deepest spiritual experience to transform man. However, the concept of mysticism in poetry is difficult for a common man to interpret except those who had experienced and can realize the divine truth. Therefore, to draw spiritual experiences as Aurobindo vision for in his *Savitri* through mantric poetry is obscure.

It is not possible to do full justice to Aurobindo's philosophy because of its vastness covering many topics. Aurobindo as understood gives a different interpretation of his own to each topic, making it unique. This interpretation at the same time leads us to doubt whether his vision was possible to achieve or it is utopian.

To appreciate Aurobindo's spirituality, we need to understand the planes of consciousness, which carved the understanding of the highest truth (Supermind). This proliferate interest but he was unsuccessful in achieving the vision he aimed for because the spiritual experience of his with which he tries to spiritualize humankind can be reached only by the spiritual minds. It thus becomes clear that his vision is a way for spiritual people but as a whole does not reach to the others.

His vision of spiritualization is a steady process and has an extended depth of process. Unless one reaches the level of Supermind, one cannot realize the divine. The depth process of his spirituality is the source of a deep interpretative power recognizing new vision for an essence of spiritual experience. If understanding and recognizing the process lacks a heightened and elevated experience it cannot be realized.

The attainment of Supermind through *Integral Yoga* poses a problem that what we call spiritual cannot be separated from matter in Aurobindo. The involution and evolution theory of Aurobindo itself explains this problem. In the process of involution, mind ascends and reaches the spirit. However, it does not stop there and in fact, in evolution it should again descend down to the level of matter to bring divine life on earth. This means that his evolution theory does not separate spirit and matter but unites the two. Therefore, Aurobindo's spiritual philosophy is not purely spiritual in nature but here spirit and matter is intertwined and always goes together.

To this, he says spiritual cannot be pure form of spirit and we can never reach that. This is a point where he disagrees with the principle of *Advaita Vedanta*, that there

can be a state of pure spirit. Therefore, in all the intervening stages of mind, evolution and involution according to Aurobindo, matter and spirit goes hand in hand. When one reaches the level of Supermind, then only one recognizes spirit and matter as one. This state of recognition, he calls *Satchidananda*.

4.7 Overall Evaluation of Spirituality

With a concern for his country, as discussed, Aurobindo had tried to bring out the meaning of spirituality underlying in Indian culture. A vision of free India was his goal and he search forth spirituality in almost everything. Some of the main themes discussed were politics, mother, Indian culture, yoga and aesthetic. He connected politics to spirituality for developing spirituality to a broader aspect and through these themes; he had tried to reach out and explain how spirituality can be attained for the realization of divine truth. The central concern in all these and Aurobindo's ultimate vision is 'a realization of the divine truth'.

The common aim or purpose throughout Aurobindo's vision and writing is the notion of spirituality. In all that he had discussed, the aspect of spiritual transformation was the main point that he wants to achieve. According to him, with the descend of the Supermind, a real transformation can take place in the world. To reach the Supermind is to go through a set of five sequential planes of mind that he gave: higher mind, illumined mind, intuitive mind, overmind and Supermind. As explained in detail in the first chapter, he has explained the steps and process of reaching the Supermind through his evolution theory. What was central in his philosophy is the evolution of consciousness as through the realization of the Supermind, one can realize the divine consciousness then only divine truth can be achieved is his final vision.

In the context of his planes of mind, "descend and ascend" are the methods of attaining the divine. What does it mean to go up to the level of Supermind and then

again descend down to bring Supramental consciousness to the lower levels of mind on earth? According to him, the higher mind is although spiritual; this mind is very much in the level of our ordinary mind that is not free from ignorance. As such, a spiritual development cannot take place in that kind of mind. The mind therefore ascends to illumined mind, which can transform the spiritual mind to a more spiritual mind. Likewise, as the mind moves to the next higher level there is opening to the realization of the divine. In this way, it reaches the highest level of Supermind. Here, there is the realization of the divine truth. However, if one remains in this level of Supermind as divinized then divinizing the earth, which is Aurobindo's goal, cannot take place. Therefore, he says, from here one should descend down to the level of ordinary mind to divinize the earth. The descend of Supramental force should divinize the mind, life and body then only real transformation can take place. This is his spiritual evolution in the planes of mind.

This is a new form of spiritual evolution for attaining spirituality. Let us consider here his new form of spirituality and the idea of spirituality in Hinduism. To understand the ultimate reality in Hinduism, the realization of the true self is necessary. For a truly self-realized person, there is no distinction between atman, the individual self and Brahman the universal self. A consideration of the ultimate reality to be different from the individual self-means that one is under the control of ignorance. Ignorance draws that atman and Brahman are two different realities. However, when one is able to see a single thread running through all, then one can said to have understood the universal self. This realization of Atman and Brahman is the spiritual goal in Hinduism. This can be seen in the lines of Prabuddha Bharata, where he says,

“The goal of one's life should be to come face to
face with the source of all speech, the source of
all Thought-the Brahman. That requires one to

annihilate the mind by going to its root, ignorance“. (Abhilash Rajendran, *Understanding Atman and Brahman in Hinduism-Difference-Individual-Universal Self*. January 31, 2019).

Let us also consider the idea of spirituality in other major religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

- i) Buddhism - Like the foundation of many religions, Buddhists have the same idea that we must prepare ourselves to manifest a divine presence. They do not believe in God but what they also strive to attain is a spiritual enlightenment. Most Buddhists believe in rebirth but not in reincarnation. These rebirths inevitably include suffering and they want to put an end to the cycles of rebirth. Their goal is to purify the heart and to let go the sensual attachments of worldly desires. Thus, meditation paved the way for attaining moksha-the deliverance of the mind and a cessation of the suffering. This is the spiritual goal of Buddhism.
- ii) Christianity - The Christians believe in their personal and an infinite God. They believe that all had sinned, and Jesus the savior and Messiah had died for all to redeem them from their sins. For a Christian, spirituality is a quest for authentic life weaving the values and beliefs of Christianity into life. Bible defines spirituality as the practice of Christian faith, and Christian faith is based on the belief in life of Christ and his gospel to the world. So, a spiritual Christian builds a strong relationship with God through prayer. The result of Christian spirituality will be what is called in the Bible as the fruit of the spirit.

“But the fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace,
long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith,

Meekness, temperance: against such things
there is no law" (*Bible, Galatians 5, 22-23,*
KJV).

- iii) Islam – A spiritual development in Islam is synonym with nearness to Allah. A distance from Allah signifies the spiritual fall of man. A disobedient person will not be able to get close to Allah and a distance from Allah signifies the spiritual fall of man. What distinguishes is the nature of their relationship with Allah. Man (faith) is the first necessity of spiritual development and they should be aware that Allah is the aim of all his endeavors. In addition to faith, Islam has laid down the methods of spiritual development on five pillars. They are i) Prayer (salat) ii) Fast (sawm) iii) Almsgiving (zakat) iv) Pilgrimage (hajj) v) Jihad. This are the highest spirituality, Islam wants to cultivate.

In the words of Maulana Wahiduddin Khan, Spirituality is,

“It is the elevation of the human condition to a plane on which the mind is focused on the higher, non-material realities of a godly existence. (*Khan Maulana Wahiduddin. Islam Rediscovered Discovering Islam From its Original Sources, p.250*).

Now looking at Aurobindo's spirituality, we can find similar manner as it is in religion in which spirituality can be realized by understanding the true self and an understanding of the divine being within, then only divine truth can be achieved. However, what was new in Aurobindo's realization of the higher truth was the descend of Supermind to mental mind.

As mentioned, we can see there is a common thread running in the idea of spirituality in all religions. The attainment of spirituality is the search of something higher and bigger and once this spirituality is realized, it will lead you to a closer relationship with God. This relation with God is what every religion seeks in spiritual development. What is different in Aurobindo is that, he does not claim that a realization of the divine will lead to a union with God but instead to a realization of the divine truth. This realization of the divine truth he calls it spirituality. Let us consider the lines of Aurobindo here to understand what his view of religion means,

“In his considerate opinion, Sri Aurobindo however speaks of religion in terms of ‘isms’ such as Hinduism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam etc. and says that the differences between religions lie in their outward machinery of creed, cult, ceremony and symbols. Despite these outward differences, every religion seeks after spiritual truth, which according to him, is the inmost essence of any religion.”. (*Anil Kumar Tiwari, Religion and Spirituality in Sri Aurobindo's Spirituality, p.7-8*).

These lines say the very purpose of religion is the understanding, discovering of divine and spiritual truth. If this is understood of religion, then Aurobindo's definition of spirituality is not convincing although he denies that he is not preaching any particular religion. This is because his spirituality also like religion seeks to discover the divine within, which is the sole aim of realizing the divine truth. If the higher objective of religion is to discover the divinity, then Aurobindo is not far from being different in the search of truth.

My idea of spirituality also is the same as it is in all other religion. It searches for something that is higher and bigger. Many often tend to think that religion and spirituality is the same thing but spirituality discovers what is bigger than our self, 'the truth' and religion tells what truth is. Although these are two different things, to me a spiritual growth always needs a guiding force, which one can find that force in religion.

One can identify oneself as Christian, Hindu or Muslim as that defines them being a religious person and that religiosity leads them to the path of religious goal. As such, religion and spirituality are complementary to each other. In recent times, many have claimed to define themselves as spiritual but not religious. Religion is often understood as essentially institutionalized with a set of beliefs and dogmas. However, spirituality may occur without a framework of institution or can occur outside of it. This is how people chose not to be tied down by set of rules. In general,

“Religion is as an organized system of beliefs, practices, beliefs and rituals designed to facilitate the relationship with the sacred or transcendent’ whereas spirituality is viewed as a more personal and experiential connection”. (*Canda. R.Edward R.Canda, Leola Dyrud Furman, Spiritual Diversity in Social Work Practice, p.23*).

From here, we see that religion believes in something sacred as distinct from Spirituality that does not follow a particular practice of set beliefs but is in search of meaning to life. Spirituality may mean different things to different people. I consider spirituality to be connected to God that also connects our deepest self. A spiritual

seeker can be anybody, a theist or an atheist seeking to realize the truth but a spiritually signified has attachment to religion. The balance between religion and spirituality is important as the aspect of one could lead to the progress of the other. Religion is spiritual and therefore a religious person cannot be religious and not spiritual because then one's religious life would become meaningless. What spirituality pointed is that we need to connect to what is beyond the physical world and what is bigger. To this, religion points out that there is a God and we are in need of God. Let us look at a definition here by Martin on religion,

“Religion means that your understanding of God and the spiritual life can more easily transcend your individual understanding and imagination. Do you imagine God as a stern judge? That is fine - if it helps, you draw closer to God to become a more moral person. But a religious tradition can enrich your spiritual life in ways that you might not be able to discover by yourself”. (*James Martin SJ, Spiritual and Religious: The Benefits of being both*).

This holds that an understanding of both can complement the value of each other as we can also see in the lines below,

“Overall, being spiritual and being religious are both part of being in relationship with God. Neither can be fully realized without the other. Religion without spirituality becomes a dry list of dogmatic statements divorced from the life of the spirit”. (*James Martin SJ, Spiritual and Religious: The benefits of being both*).

Coming back to Aurobindo, although his idea of spirituality is the same as all other religion as pointed earlier, it can be asked here if he can be classed under the group of spirituals that are spiritual but not religious. Does being spiritual and not religious carry with it any consequences? This phenomenon has become so large overtime and we may say those coming under this are people who do not like to be tied down by set of beliefs and practices or they are sometimes who cannot seem to identify with any religion. As such, they can essentially choose what they agree with and find meaning in all religion or philosophies of their choice. However, what is understood in Aurobindo is that, he being a mystic and a spiritually realized, he is trying to lead others to a realization of the divine truth. He claims that he is not trying to develop any religion but rather wants to promote the inner self-development that can be perceived in all as oneness and this truth he finds in all religion. Therefore, he does not reject but accepts the truth in all religion.

Throughout his search of spirituality, his ultimate goal remained the realization of the divine within that would lead to divine truth. Spirituality is the essence of religion and he says it should not be forgotten. Hence, we can say that he never detaches his idea of spirituality from religion. His acceptance of the truth in religion regards why he cannot be class under the group of people who call themselves spiritual but not religious.

Aurobindo is different in his own kind, although as mentioned, he claimed of not preaching any religion; he says the hope of future is a spiritual religion. Thus, he has brought his own kind of religion through which he aims to divinize the earth but he does not mean an ordinary religion. He insists upon the freedom of spiritual life because indeed the inner spirit is one. If there can be a religion of humanity, then there can be development and a growing realization that there is a divine reality. To live out this knowledge is a growing attempt to bring divine life on earth. The perfection and permanent happiness is founded on full and free life of an individual

but there must be an inner sense of unity. The inner spirit and realization of the divine must be complete and a means of fundamental human unity. This should become the base of spiritual oneness with the basis for a higher type of human existence and spirit.

In his spiritual religion, he had tried to establish truth that could unite all. A divine truth through meditation and yoga is what he has tried to bring about. Apart from becoming a spiritually realized, what he establishes his mark as a spiritual mystic is his ashram 'Auroville' to achieve his vision. The mother and Aurobindo had decided *Integral Yoga* to be the method of the ashram where people can practice yoga in-group as a community. Auroville is a world of its own where different people come and live together for the development of human unity. The purpose of Auroville is,

“Auroville wants to be a universal town where men and women of all countries are able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds, all politics and all nationalities. The purpose of Auroville is to realize Human Unity – The Mother”.
(Ron Geaves, *Prem Rawat and Counterculture Glastonbury and New Spiritualities*, p.39).

In Auroville, is the Matrimandir, which literally means 'Temple of the Mother' for meditation. This is the soul of Auroville for inner discovery. Let us look at the lines to understand what matrimandir is,

“The Mother has given us matrimandir as the soul of Auroville, a powerful radiating center for transformation”. (*Shraddhavan, Ritam, Evolution towards Human Unity. February 2010*).

Now looking at Auroville, what can be accepted that was made possible of Aurobindo's vision is the participation of people that has been drawn to Auroville from various places of the world, a fulfillment of his vision that he was able to reach to the universal audience. In the ashram, Aurobindo and the mother had repeatedly tried to make clear that the ashram does not practice any religion and is open to all. Concerning his ashram, he proclaims,

“What is being done here is the preparation of a Truth which includes all other Truth but is limited to no single religion or creed, and this preparation has to be done apart and in silence until things are ready”.
(*Sri Aurobindo, Letters on Himself and the Ashram, p .699*)

However, a Muslim disciple asked Aurobindo if only Hindus will profit from this ashram and whether, Supramental consciousness will come down on somebody who is a non-Hindu. Aurobindo says,

“The Ashram has nothing to do with Hindu religion or culture or any religion or nationality. The truth of the divine, which is the spiritual reality behind all religions and the descent of the Supramental, which is not known to any religion, are the sole things which will be the foundation of the work of the future”. (Sri Aurobindo, *Letters on Himself and the Ashram, p.701*).

In his later years of turning to becoming a mystic, it was during these meditation days or in other words, when he began his yogic practices, he stopped alluding to Hindu themes. In 1918 he wrote in a passage as quoted by Peter Heehs that,

“Aurobindo seemed to think that it was possible; but later in his life he became less confident that traditional religion had a significant role to play in the development of integral spirituality. This conclusion came at the end of a long engagement with religion that began in England, took a new turn in Baroda and again in Calcutta, and reached an ambiguous conclusion in Pondicherry”. (*Peter Heehs, Sri Aurobindo and Hinduism, p.34*).

If we accept to be true of his ashram that it is not religious, what caught our attention are his teachings in the ashram. Aurobindo went on to say,

“There is no creed or set of dogmas, no governing religious body at the ashram; there are only the teachings of Aurobindo and certain psychological practices of concentration and meditation etc., for the enlarging of the consciousness, receptivity to the truth, mastery over the desires, the discovery of the divine self and consciousness concealed within each human being, a higher evolution of the nature”. (*Peter Heehs, Sri Aurobindo and Hinduism, p.42*).

We can see here that perhaps what is practiced in the ashram is Aurobindo's teachings and the method of *Integral Yoga* as decided by him and the mother. If *Integral Yoga* is the method to achieve his vision of human unity, it can be protested that is he not doing anything new in the ashram. As discussed in this chapter above, his *Integral Yoga* was an aim to reach the Supramental level to divinize the earth. However, *Integral Yoga* has failed to achieve its purpose as it restricts to spirituals and yogis and therefore could not be achieved by all. If the same purpose of *Integral*

Yoga is practiced in the ashram then it will restrict to strong willed people doing yoga to achieve human unity. What is understood of him in other way around is that he had never given up on his vision of *Integral Yoga*. In fact, it continued in the ashram with a different goal of achieving human unity.

Aurobindo had taken a big step to spiritualize his fellow citizens as well as the world but in the course of time realized that it was impossible to achieve this vision through religion, which he started with. However if not religion, he brought out his method of *Integral Yoga*, became a mystic and had a similar dream of uniting humanity, which was made visible with his establishment of the ashram. Nevertheless, when we look at present day Auroville, the people in the ashram seem to be comfortable but do not have a mission or vision for the world as Aurobindo did.

As mentioned, the purpose of his ashram is to have a community of human unity living in peace. Although that harmony is maintained, people are more interested in personal yogic experiences and seemed they are drawn towards Auroville mostly for spiritual contentment. Some others are drawn towards it out of curiosity and it became mostly a place for visitors, while others tend to find it fanciful that one is able to have a spiritual experience resulting in some kind of elevation or mysticism without having to follow a religion. Let us consider the words of Bina Bhatia talking about Auroville in the present day,

“Auroville’s largest failure has been this disconnect with the local populace. While it all started as a project that would unite the east and west, what it has really become is almost a small community of foreigners largely ignorant of their local neighbors”.
(Bina Bhatia, *Auroville: A Utopian paradox*, p.8)

Today, it does not follow well as planned of his ashram and his vision of human unity remained unfulfilled. What Aurobindo visions for, achieving human unity therefore remained Utopian. In fact, 'Auroville' can be called a living Utopian dream of Aurobindo for a perfect global town.

Aurobindo had tried to connect his experiences through spirituality to achieve his vision of divine life on earth and his start as a political leader later took a shift to becoming a spiritual mystic. To understand Aurobindo's philosophy, is to read him in two phases, i) a political leader ii) a spiritual mystic. If these two phases are understood as separate entities then we can understand him better and draw a line of difference between his nationalism and mysticism.

Perhaps, in between the two phases of his life we can also highlight Aurobindo as a creative thinker. The phase of the creative thinker can represent his writing phase, where his new method of spiritual practice, the *Integral Yoga* also evolved. Its aim for a spiritual realization to transform man started in this period. In fact, his spiritual experiences were put into writing. The mystical experience of highest level was also put into writing in his epic poem 'Savitri'. Thus, instead of going back to connect with the world for a universal transformation of humanity or to divinize the earth as he preached, he remained in the mystic realm. In fact, his retirement into meditation had no more connection with politics or a humanitarian transformation and all his attention was drawn to attaining spirituality. He therefore, failed to practice what he preached.

4.8 Conclusion

This chapter had discussed various important topics and issues Aurobindo had touched upon in seeking to bring out the underlying spiritual meaning in them. In all the above discussion, we find that what he aimed for was an endeavor to reach out to the people in conformity of spirituality, a divine life on earth and at last human unity.

With this, one of the main starting points he had tried is to merge politics and spirituality for a progressive renewal of the country. However, the possibility of the co-existence of spirituality and politics for a conscious effort to achieve freedom failed. Despite his vision of freedom, the leap to spirituality dissociated him completely from politics. Spirituality, on the other hand alone could not succeed the aim of human unity or a universal divinization because the high level of spirituality he talked about became closed to spiritual minded. This signifies that although spirituality is important for realizing spiritual goals, on a practical ground it could not solve the other problems of social and political issues. Aurobindo's new way of spirituality was not to put an end to Indian spirituality but to achieve a higher level of consciousness in spirituality with his spiritual inspiration and his creative way of thinking. However, the universal divinization and spirituality that he tried to achieve was inscrutable to many and could not connect to his vision.

CONCLUSION

We have seen how Aurobindo had tried to use spirituality as a means to achieve the purpose of realizing the divine life on earth. He believed that the divine is present in everything and within us. However, the divine consciousness cannot be achieved through our ordinary state of mind, therefore, it needs to be realized by heightening our consciousness. Aurobindo attempted to establish on earth a heaven through spiritual transformation and it was his sole purpose to make spiritual experience or the realization of the divine possible for all. Thus, realizing the spiritual consciousness is an objective to evolve into an awakened and higher state of the divine within the self.

As discussed in the introduction, the thesis had tried to understand the spiritual foundations of India. As India was forced into a decline of its spiritual culture, Aurobindo had formulated new theories and methods and tried to relive the old spiritual traditions of India. His main concern for the country was how external forces such as British rule affected the country. He was not only concerned about India's freedom but also feared that the spiritual tradition of India would end if the spiritual values were not renewed and regenerated. With a realization of the spiritual gift of India, he effectively put into practice linking life into spiritual action. Thus, he dreams of India taking the spiritual lead of the world. Therefore, his new vision accepts spirit as the ultimate truth.

With his new vision, Aurobindo had tried to spiritualize everything. He felt there was a need of a force that should serve as a medium and tool to unite his people. According to him, this can be achieved through the realization of the spiritual force that can work among his fellow citizens. He saw India stood at a time that is in need of a spiritual revival and he has tried to bring about this. He also felt the necessity to uplift human beings through spirituality that will not only renounce one's ignorance but also further grow to reach a transcendental level. In order to achieve the transcendental level, he gave the five planes or levels of mind to broaden the consciousness to reach the highest level of Supermind. Thus, the real transformation takes place only with the descent of the Supermind. This un-foldment of spiritual destiny will culminate in divine life upon earth. Spirituality or spiritual experience was a concrete vision that depends on a greater power of inner sight too. Therefore, he proposed to spiritualize everything.

The political activities of Aurobindo from 1906-1910 revealed his diverse influences. As a political leader, he visualized a complete change in the politics of India. He visions a complete freedom and an India free from any kind of oppression from outsiders and they being mis-governed. Therefore, as a foremost political freedom, he had attempted social, political and educational reforms to instill in the minds of his people the need for national progress and reform that would allow India to be free not only politically but also spiritually. In his political thought, he had thus started a theory of spiritual nationalism that tries to seek politics through spirituality to solve the problems of the nation. He was a political leader in the beginning trying to lead the mass for the country's freedom but as he realized political freedom could be achieved through spirituality, he became a yogi and thus became the innovator of Supramental consciousness. After this, there was the conception of his spiritual evolution. The spiritual evolution of Aurobindo is a path that leads to evolve upward gradually. This step of evolution leads the mind to Supermind and there realizes truth-consciousness. However, the evolution of Aurobindo does not stop with the

attainment of Supermind but descends into the lower realm again until it reaches the lowest form of mind to divinize man.

To attain Supermind Aurobindo had brought about his integral yoga. Through his own sadhana and yogic practices, he had perfected and gradually developed his integral yoga. According to him, integral yoga can enable us to move to a clearer and ultimately to higher consciousness. Unlike, the traditional yoga, which seeks to attain moksha, his integral yoga aims at spiritual attainment to divinize all. He brings together the four traditional *yoga's* the *Jnana yoga*, the *Bhakti yoga*, Karma yoga and Raj yoga and put before us the integral yoga. Integrating all the four *yogas* can enable one to rise to the Supramental level. Thus, the aim of integral yoga was not merely to rise out from our ordinary ignorant world-consciousness but to bring down the Supramental power into the mind, life and body, to transform them and create a divine life in matter and on earth. Integral yoga does not proceed through mental teaching but by self-concentration and by self-opening to the divine power and its workings. The main purpose of Integral yoga is to transform our narrow way of thinking into deep and wide spiritual consciousness to integrate our ordinary life into divine life. The process of Integral yoga also was to first open the range of the inner self-development and from there evolve into a higher Supramental consciousness for transforming and divinizing man.

In envisioning a spiritual goal for India, Aurobindo also takes the aesthetic tradition in a unique way. He does not look upon beauty and delight as it is in the aesthetic tradition, but searches for the spirit in art. The appeal of Indian art responds to the call of the spirit. Aurobindo opines art is not something external but spiritual. The traditional Indian theory of art describes aesthetic experience through drama. However, he departs from this and gives a spiritual touch to Indian art. Aurobindo, thus expanded art to poetry as well and reaches the highest level of aesthetic experience through art of poetry. Coomaraswamy was also of the view like

Aurobindo that Indian aesthetics was based on the doctrines of religious values that are not only intellectual but also transcendental. Thus, he says aesthetic experience liberates human spirit from its bondage and soars towards its destination. Art for Aurobindo and Coomaraswamy was not just art of the beautiful but it was spiritual. Therefore, they laid emphasis not on the external objective theory of Indian aesthetics but on an integral approach to aesthetics that will reach to the spirit.

An analysis of Aurobindo's philosophy of spirituality had been discussed after which it is understood that his belief in a higher spiritual force was a necessary thing that must be the basis - for India's freedom and greatness. This spiritual force should come in him and others. This he preached can be achieved through integral yoga. A free India and a great spiritual ideal, he says is destined to uplift the world and initiate a spiritual evolution. Therefore, he had worked to create a spiritual life as a means to bring down the higher consciousness not merely for salvation but to bring divine life upon earth. The descent of a truth consciousness bringing divine life upon earth can develop divine consciousness and he believes it will be the final sense of earth's evolution. His main aim was therefore to bring down Supermind upon earth to help the spiritual advancement of his people.

What was attempted is an overview and an understanding of how Aurobindo had tried to use spirituality as a tool to free his country. Aurobindo teaches the possibility of the descend of a higher principle. He says, this principle will not only release the spiritual self-out into the world but would replace the mind's ignorance with a Supramental-truth consciousness. He thus suggests steps and methods to be taken for this Supramental descend. He brings in his theory of evolution and Integral yoga, to awaken in man the inner being and to discover in oneself the true soul and the divine being, which is the Supramental truth consciousness. This however, cannot be done at once; therefore, there are levels of consciousness starting from the mind, which then develop towards the Supermind with spirit as the dominant force.

Aurobindo's unique distinction lies in his translation of things into a spiritual tradition. He was not only concerned with the symbolism and the traditions of India art and culture, but is more drawn towards what defines them as spiritual. Perhaps, his interpretation of the spirit gave a unique conception of the understanding of India as essentially being spiritual. His imaginative or creative endeavor led him to the search of spirituality that is in man and everything else.

He had been a pioneer who had touched so many aspect of existence. With concern to every issue, he has taken all his activities to the level of spirituality and guided by reassuring that nothing spiritual can fail. He had opened new possibilities and promises based on spirituality, thus making him a thinker whose vision is beyond the ordinary mental life. It is thus according to him that in a spiritualized society, a person will be liberated from the ego and be guided by one's own divine nature and will be a divine law to oneself.

Aurobindo had a vision that is far into the future to offer a solution to the political problems of his country. Therefore, he started his political movements to bring forth the change. He finds the present institution inadequate because man that is bound to be imperfect runs it. The final solution to all the social and political problems, he found lies in the transformation of man's nature into the divine using spiritual powers. He therefore, shifted from being political to becoming a mystic.

The central thought of his philosophy is the realization of spirituality that could transform and divinize man for a divine life on earth. He was inspired by spirituality and his experiences were brought out by the spiritual experiences that he had experienced at different times.

However, reading Aurobindo from being a political leader to becoming a spiritual mystic is complex because of the shifts he took and there was no con He proposes to spiritualize everything. He says, spirituality is higher than religion. Therefore, what

he was seeking is a universal religion; not based on religion but a realization of the spirit that once realized can divinize life.

In trying to understand Aurobindo's philosophy of spirituality, I attempted to discuss various aspects of his perspectives on spirituality. I looked at why some of his aims and visions failed, while others were able to bring in the desired change that reached out to the people as he had envisioned and visualized.

The spiritual nationalism, the social and political activities of Aurobindo had become a powerful force in reaching out to the people, particularly with regards to attaining the country's independence from British occupation which lasted nearly two centuries. His political ideas as mentioned was best extended to the people soon after he started writing articles for *Bande Mataram*, an English daily started by Bipin Chandra Pal, where his ideas reached out to the youths allowing them to rethink foreign rule and imposition.

All his life, Aurobindo had worked to divinize mankind. It was not only politically and socially, he had tried to spiritualize but his poetry also takes its stand on divinity. Most of his poems are spiritual and mystical and his spiritual vision is manifested in his poetry as vivid. His poetry was not mere poetry but it transforms and delights, and has the power of transforming the ordinary into the spiritual. Therefore, as far as his poems are concerned, it results in a divine transformation of unprecedented spiritual development in a poetic surge.

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