

The Concept of State
In
Recent Indian Thought

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(Kalyani Poddar)

Chapter I: Introduction

The Emergence of the State and Other Issues

In this chapter, an attempt will be made to give an account of the origin of the state as a social and political structure in human civilization in India and the West. Other related issues will also be attended to. The term “state” is a loaded one. It carries on its back a few centuries of varied use and purpose. It owes its origin to particular thread of circumstances in history, inciting the speaker and the hearer to make normative judgments. The issue of the state is at the heart of the history of political thought in the modern world. It may be noted that most of human history has not been graced by the presence of states. From fossil records, it has been found that the first really recognizable state appeared in Mesopotamia around 3000 B.C¹. In India, it was not until the Nandas and the Mauryyas when there was the imperial state and Kautilya’s *Arthasāstra*² speaks of the existence of kingdoms and lays down principles for the consolidation of the king’s authority. The discovery of the *Arthasāstra* was a form of exoneration of the charge that the Indian society was unconcerned with political relationships. Archeological findings at Harappa and Mahenjadarō, however, provide evidence for trade and growth of towns - an evidence of existence of polity.

I

Varṇa or class is a basic political factor in the Indian context. Kingship or monarchy, which was the normal form of ancient Indian polity may be said to have its origin to the caste system, ruling being a caste function assigned to the *kṣatriya* or warrior class. In the code of Vishnu we find the King is enjoined “to keep the four castes and the four orders in the practice of their several duties”.³ The early Hindu literature casts light on the purpose of the origin of the state and government. It elaborates a theory of man’s decline and progressive loss of virtues until he lives in the most evil age, *Kali Yuga*. Thus, the *Mahānirvāṇa Tantra* says: “Now the sinful Kali Age is upon them when dharma is destroyed,

an Age full of evil customs and deceit”.⁴ Accordingly government became necessary for the protection of the *dharma* as a form of divine aid to struggling humanity. The ancient code of Brhaspati explains: “In former ages men were strictly virtuous and devoid of mischievous propensities. Now that avarice and malice have taken possession of them, judicial proceedings have been established”.⁵ Judicial proceedings can be instituted only by a king with the help of his Brahmin priest.

Some studies of Indian political thought explain kingship in a way which seems to be modeled on the social contract theories.⁶ The king is himself bound to rule by the principles of *dharma*, and since the citizens have a corresponding duty to obey the king’s edicts and support his administration, there is an implied social covenant. In some sources, the covenant theory is set forth more specifically. The *Mahābhārata* tells of men, living in a state of social chaos, approach the God Brahma and request the appointment of a king. Brahma then suggests Manu, but the latter agrees to serve only after the people guarantee to respect his rule.⁷ An early Buddhist account in the *Dīghanikāya* refers to a definite contract between an elected king and his people.⁸ According to Kautilya: “ People suffering from anarchy, as illustrated by the proverbial tendency of a large fish swallowing a small one, first elected Manu ... to be their king ...”⁹ Referring to this, historian R.P. Sharma says: “Underlying every concept of kingship was the doctrine of *mātsyanyāya*— the analogy of the big fish eating the little fish”.¹⁰ The Indian political tradition has its beginning in the oldest Hindu literature – the Vedic *Samhitās* and undergoes centuries of exposition, interpretation and revision in the literary epics, legal codes, and political texts before the Christian Era.

It is difficult to isolate political ideas in ancient India from the sea of philosophy and myths in which they are buried. Perhaps this situation is excusable since even scholars have begun to open up the vast treasures of ancient Indian thought and since the Indian political thought cannot be isolated

from the main body of Hindu philosophy. According to some historians, property, family, tribe, caste, religion and land systems contributed to the formation of political ideas and institutions in early India. Until the end of the nineteenth century, the dominant idea was that Indian life has always been dominated by philosophy, mysticism, asceticism and world renouncing religions, and had done little in developing the idea of the state or practical political institutions. This is a very one-sided point of view. Since the late Vedic period (about 600 B.C.), Indian thought had been dominated by the idea of the *tri-varga* – the aims of human life. These are *dharma*, religious and moral duties, *artha*, practical affairs of life, and *kāma*, enjoyment of life. India has been successful in keeping these elements of life in balance. One reason for the exaggerated emphasis which is often placed upon the spiritual element in Indian life is the fact that the only literature which has been preserved from the first thousand years or so of Indian history is almost entirely religious. The discovery of the work of Kautilya gave a corrective to this one-sided view.

As our purpose here is not primarily to describe the historical origins and development of the political institution of the state or kingship, we give but a brief outline or sketch of the matter. We now pass over to some non-Hindu doctrines.

In the Islamic culture polity was transient and attracted the name, “cyclical state”.¹¹ States came and went, and were of larger or smaller size at various periods; but they never lasted long enough ever to be rationalized at all. The fear of tribesmen meant putting larger premium on military power than the urban strata. In Muslim society war remained the greatest potential source of profit as opposed to profit from land. While in Europe, the reasonably settled character of the state forced monarchs to provide infrastructural facilities and services to gain revenue, Muslim society did not have a multi-polar state system equivalent to that of Europe. In summary, the cyclical state in Islam was unstable, arbitrary and predatory enough to interfere directly with the working of justice and

autonomy of society. The government was weak and few services could be provided by the state.

Classical social scientists in the West have essentially evolutionary views about the origin of state. The state arose when a certain way of life is replaced by another, say, when the hunter-gatherer way of life is replaced by the intervention of agriculture, or when progression from band/herd to community living took place, or when there was a transition from the state of nature to civil society, necessitating the fulfillment of certain common purposes.¹² This is the view of the political liberals in the West and the classical statement of this is found in John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*.¹³ Marxism sees the emergence of the state as due to the birth of class in human history. If both these theories can be termed societal theories, a third group of thinking has attributed the origin of the state to the unsettling of a settled population by an external invasion. This view is dubbed as realism, and finds its supporters in Oppenheimer¹⁴ and Max Weber¹⁵ among others. In view of the points stated above, we may say that there are three theories regarding our understanding of the state. Any understanding of the state involves taking note of two things: (i) state is a force within society and (ii) state as a social actor in external interactions with a larger world. We shall discuss these three theories in some details. While examining them in turn, we shall pay particular attention to their views of the state in terms of the two points stated above.

Liberalism holds the individual to be the seat of moral worth.¹⁶ A notable liberal thinker is Adam Smith who in the third book of *Wealth of Nations*¹⁷ describes the manner in which spread of commerce gave birth to the autonomous and productive city whose economic impact in undermining the feudal power was great. A decent political system came into existence by replacing naked power with economic growth. Smith envisages that a certain type of state, a minimalist "night-watchman" ensures peace, easy taxes and a tolerant administration of justice. Thus, for Smith, in the causal chain of social development Capitalism is instrumental to the development of the liberal state.

One of the sophisticated liberal thinkers is Immanuel Kant. His “Perpetual Peace”¹⁸ is characterized by a remarkable realism. He accepted that the State, seen in the background of European international relations, was a necessary instrument of security, but he nevertheless produced a plan to encourage peace. Peace would follow if states had liberal governments, opened themselves to outsiders and encouraged trade with other similar states in a liberal league. Such a state of affairs would encourage peace because war-killing and trade, destroyed by war, would restrain governments. It was the last of Kant’s ideas, concerning the pacific tendencies of international trade, which came to dominate liberalism in the nineteenth century. Kant links his liberal political ideas with his ethical theory. As a prophet of peace, Kant speaks about the ethical criteria of political measure and the moral obligation to seek and preserve peace. Politics is an empirical discipline. It is the art of the empirically possible. Ethics is the science of what is morally necessary. Thus, ethics should take precedence over politics. Kant relies on two principles: the first is the ethical principle of categorical imperative which enjoins us to respect human beings as ends in themselves; the second is the legal principle which underlies the domain of government that men ought to and as rational beings do seek to extend the rule of law. Thus, for Kant, the political analogue of the realm of ends is a republic. In a republic laws are self-imposed and the rights and interests of men will be honoured. Thus, Kant sees the moral law and its political corollary as the key to international peace.

Kant wants to translate the moral law into the language of positive law and politics. Kant’s context was that of war and peace which is not our direct concern. Yet, he makes certain very important suggestions which are relevant for our purpose. One such suggestion is that the state is not the geographical occupation of a site. It is a society of men, who no one else has a right to command except the state itself. In a state there should be priority of the ethical over the political. It is, however, not expected that kings should philosophies or

philosophers should become kings. But kings or king-like people should let philosophers speak openly and not remain silent. This is indispensable for the business of government. It is a point to remember that morality is the theoretical doctrine and politics is the practical doctrine of right and there is no conflict between theory and practice.

Advocates of liberal democratic state took the individual and his interest as the touchstone. "The people" were less a collectivity than a collection of unique individuals who required means to pursue their free choices with as little interferences from the state as possible. The Basis of Marx and Engels' theory of state is a rejection of the notion that one starts from an analysis of the individual and his or her relation to the state. "It is not the single isolated individual who is active in historical and political processes, but rather human beings who live in definite relations with others and whose nature is defined through these relations".¹⁹ For Marx and Engels the state embodies the interest of the dominant class; the rules that it produces correspondingly serve the interest of some rather than all of the people. The view that the state is an instrument of class rule can be assimilated to economic reductionism that "the economic base determines the struggle for state power as well as the institutional form of the state".²⁰

Marx and Engels were generally, if not always, alert to the difficulties of simple reductionist or instrumentalist theories of the state, and offered numerous qualifications which indicate that the correspondence between the base and the super-structure was not straightforwardly linear or mechanistic. These qualifications indicate a second approach to the relationship between classes and the State to that found in the *Communist Manifesto* or the *German Ideology*. This approach, according to most interpreters, is found in *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.²¹ It sees the state as possessing a measure of independent power and not as necessarily linked to the interests of the dominant class.

It is, however, not clear whether such a reading is to be regarded as "exceptional" or as a more regular feature of capitalist democracy. There is no definite resolution to this uncertainty for, in their works Marx and Engels do not

provide a coherent abstract definition of the state of the kind found in their conception of the capitalist economy (e.g., commodity or value). It has been suggested by N.Harding²² that in Marx's writings can be found two conceptions of socialism which are associated with two contrary models of the state. The self-governing commune belongs to Marx's earlier phase when his view of socialism was centered on the necessity to overcome alienation through the transformation of the patterns of authority within society. In this view, the state, along with private ownership of productive property, was a major source of man's alienation, comprised as it was of separate bodies of armed men standing outside and above society. Its abolition would involve the abolition of standing army, the police and the judiciary, whose functions were to be appropriated by the people in arms. In place of bureaucratic interests that sustain state exploitation of society, there would be communes in which people would directly make and implement decisions, and would take responsibility not only for legislation and executive decisions but also for judicial, policing and defensive functions. Thus, although Marx stressed that class conflict would eventually allow for the "withering away of the state" – the advocacy of a powerful interventionist State was the culmination of Marx's critique of the liberal view that economic life was the non-political preserve of the individual. On the contrary, Marx argued that socially useful production was the sole purpose of politics and the state, and did not constitute a separate sphere. It required a directing and efficiently administered state for the maximisation of production with the goal of creating a modern industrial but socialistic society that was characterised less by communal populism or industrial democracy than by a disciplined work force accepting managerial and state directives.

However, N. Harding points out that this model became contrary to the aims of the mature Marx who, in his later writing, regarded the state as having a much more activist role in building socialism. Socialism was viewed not on the communal model by increasingly as overcoming material want rather than human alienation. The need for the transformation of property relations to

end exploitation and to provide for the economic needs of all required not a weaker but a stronger state. The dislocations and deprivations of unregulated capitalist production could not be transformed without state ownership and control of the means of production. This would secure the twin goals of rational planning and equitable distribution. Moreover, 'a dictatorship of the proletariat' would be required to combat the inevitable resistance from the propertied classes. The second model of the state in Marx legitimises a strong state in the service of economic production and material consumption.

Realists insist that the presence of a state allows for peace in social relations within society. The provision of orders, that is, prevention of predation and terror for security reasons, is the prime task of the state. Peace is necessary in order that production, exchange and property could then follow. A stronger state presence is required for security reasons, to establish order and to create the proper human material without which modernisation is impossible.²³ The fundamental insight of the whole school is that the international system is anarchic and the relations among the states are fundamentally competitive. Hence a state must try and calculate the intentions of other States. The search for security by a State means that, in a system of states, it will seek to play balance of power politics. Thus, the United States sought to protect China, then a weak state from being swallowed up by Japan, during the courses of events of 1930's to preserve the balance of power. Again, it is natural to expect, for example, an area of weak states to stand between those which are more powerful to help warn of military attack. It is thus normal for both Israel and Syria to find contemporary Lebanon to their advantage.

Realists stress that power of a state is very closely related to its wealth. A state's drive for industrialization is largely for reasons of its military security. To maximise the former is to gain the latter and consequently power. Naturally, realists will not accept the notions of abolishing the state, for it can lead to a reversion to chaos and rule of jungle.

II

As for the question how to define a state we do not get much clue in the context of ancient political state of affairs as there was no mention of state in the proper sense of the term in the early Vedic literature. There were only tribal organisations, folk assemblies and communal institutions with rudimentary administrative set up. In post-Vedic times, beginning about 600 B.C. there began to be well-organised tribal republics and some of the elements that went into the making of *saptāṅga* theory. We find a discussion of the earliest definition of state – the *saptāṅga* theory, which was first given in the *Arthaśāstra* of Kautilya probably valid for the period of the Maurya Empire [321-184 B.C.], although elements of the theory, as just stated already goes back to 600 B.C. The seven limbs of the definition are the master (monarch), officials, people, fortified capital, treasury, army and friend (allies)²⁴. Besides, the qualifications for kingship, the methods of selection and the question of succession: the various ministers and councils which served the king; “the rule of law” centering largely around the concept of *dharma* and almost the equally important concept of *danḍa* (force or punishment or war) which made the diplomacy of ancient India “a curious mixture of supremely high ethical principles with treachery, deceit and calculated ruthlessness; remarkable theory of *maṇḍala*, which is described as a theory of inter-state relations which hold that a kingdom is an ally or enemy with respect to its geographical position and with respect to the intending conquer”.²⁵ and which has been referred to as the Hindu theory of balance of power. There is also the much-debated question of the prevalence of the “republican” forms of government.²⁶ There were, it is true, evidences of the so-called republics or *ganas* and this has been treated as the evidence of a democratic tradition in India.²⁷

There had been different attempts at understanding and interpretations of ancient Indian history from the later eighteenth century onwards first by the Orientalists or Indologists followed by generations of historians who were writing under the impact of the national movement.²⁸ So there were the opposite

trends of debasement or a glorification of political ideas. The clearly nationalistic historians writing in the 1920's, and 1930's showed an "unashamed" glorification of the ancient Indian past, perhaps as a compensation for the humiliating present, and also wrote in conscious opposition to the earlier writings, particularly, James Stuart Mill's *History of British India*(1817). Hence, the frequent comparisons of the *Arthśāstra* with the writings of Machiavelli and the ideas of Bismarck or for that matter the comparison of the *mantriparisad* as described by Kautilya with the Privy Council of Britain, and the suggestion that the Kautilyan monarch was similar to the Constitutional monarch of Britain.²⁹ However, it can be said with some degree of confidence that monarchy was the normal form of government in ancient Hindu state. *Rājan* was a familiar expression.

Even though there are divergences among theorists regarding the origin of the state, there is a great deal of agreement among them as to how the state should be defined. A composite definition would include three essentials:

1. The state is a set of institutions. These are manned by the state's own personnel. The state's most important feature is (a) the authority to lay commands and prohibitions on its people. These are backed up by the threat of coercion in such a way that decisions can be enforced.
2. The institutions of the state are at the center of a geographically bounded territory, and
3. The state monopolises rule-making within its territory.

The above definition is conceived as a general characterization of a state. Although it reveals that the state is at once institutional and functional, yet this linkage can be disrupted. In the early European Middle Ages many governmental functions – the provision of order, the rule of war and provision for justice – were provided by the church, rather than the state which existed within its boundaries. In India, Kings were recognized as individuals rather than as representatives of longer-lasting states. The state was custodial and the king

had no other duty than that of protecting the state. The *Manusmṛiti* shows *Brāhmaṇas* as priests providing laws to organize every aspect of the social life bringing peace and ensuring order. Again, not all societies have been controlled by a state; Latin Christendom was never controlled by a single state. We may, in this way, find each proposition in the stated definition as having certain limitations and the word 'tends' or 'aspires to' could be appended to virtually every statement in the definition. The state boundary was not always well-defined. It was often fuzzy and a free for all state of affairs, a feature which vitiates some states even to-day. However, this definition, usually true of states in the West at the turn of the twentieth century, remains true of the modern state as well. The modern state developed in Europe in close alliance with the rise of Capitalism and the breakthrough in industrialization.

The conception of state that emerges is that of a symbol of power, that is humanly created (not divinely ordained), and distinct from other social powers and office-holders entailing relation of power and obedience although with a space for certain public rights, e.g., citizenship, the right to vote etc. The modern state has clear territorial boundaries which in previous eras had been indefinite, porous and fluctuating. The modern state is associated with the formation of elaborate military and national police forces. When it is a nation-state, that is a state with a single culture, integration is brought about by very precise administrative boundaries within which it operates as the exclusive sources of rules (laws). The modern-nation state is characterized by a unitary sovereignty which becomes manifest in a single currency, unified legal system and an expanding state education system employing a single national language and literary tradition in the 'national' language which erodes cultural particularism. Although, the state comprises of many different offices wherein political business is transacted with reference to open-ended discussion and legal elaboration with representative bodies to allow for articulation of free expressed differences and constrained on executives, it is also evident that the state is formidable means of coercion, capable of external aggression and internal

repression. We may recall that the coercive power is not a monopoly of the state. Armed robbers, bullies and mafias use it too. The difference that is pointed out by D.D.Raphael is that “The state’s rules are supreme rules. That is what is meant by state sovereignty...”³⁰

III

The division of labour in a state to secure institutionalization brings along an impersonality that distinguishes the state and its autonomous bureaucracy from the rest of the society. Perhaps, this is why Marx and Engels regarded the division of labour as alienating, bureaucracy as parasitic, and as under the control of the dominant class and not as an autonomous entity. Even Emile Durkheim, who placed great store on the facilitative and emancipatory function of the state for its members, was also aware of the potential dangers to individual liberty from too powerful a state.

Such a conception tends to stress the autonomy of the state from societal goals – the state being a force within and an actor in an external interaction with the world there develops a distance between the state and the society. This point may be elucidated by consideration of the meaning of the word “society”. By society we mean the institutions and the functions of individual human beings in relation to these institutions which bring the individual in contact with other human beings. Social institutions are such institutions as family, educational organizations, religion as also the state. Yet, over the time, the state, the powering of the state, has held control over the rest of society. The functions of these other social institutions have been relegated to the state. The state now undertakes all the community functions. Society includes the family, the circle of friends and all other informal groups which are based on the bonds of kinship, neighbourhood and friendship - the intimate group, so to say. These social groups are regulated by the prescriptions and moral norms of a given society. These social groups although private in the sense of comprising all kinds of an individual’s activity also include the participation of the individual in decision making in the public affairs. This sphere of natural consciousness is deformed by

being subjected to the performance of certain specialized, technical actions directed by decision makers and managers. There has been an extensive proliferation of the function of the state and of large corporate monopolies in the field of production and consumption. Another sign of the erosion of social life is a reduction in public inter-action. In pre-industrial society, collective life took place in complex social communities. Now it takes the form of a specialized and formalized organization. Personal inter-action and relation in the economic sphere has died out, and has been replaced by large and mute departmental stores. The social sphere provides an arena for free self-expression and auto-determination. An increase in the state's capacity devalues social interactions.

This separation of the state and the society is of a recent origin. If we look back to the Greek political state of affairs we find that Greece was divided into so many city states like Athens, Sparta, Thebes, Ionia, Megara, etc. These states had governments as diverse as democracy, oligarchy, aristocracy, etc. They were militarily equipped, and many of them had written constitutions. Yet, the extensive civil and criminal laws, most sophisticated military and a hierarchical system of administration, which marks off the modern state was unknown to the Greek political framework. Further, the distinction that gradually develops between the individual and the state machinery which seeks to control rather than cooperate was unknown to the Greek mind. We may dwell on this point a little more. Plato never ignored private families in his *Republic*.³¹ They are indeed the bedrock of the entire state. But he also wants all citizen and their wives to attend communal meals organized on the Spartan model. The Greek polis was believed to be that where men had seen the collective life of their city as the essence and the meaning of their lives, had sought their glory in its public life, their rewards within it, and immortality in its memory. The state was that structure which provided an individual the opportunity for his over-all development. It is the place where the individual is equipped to perform human actions excellently, and so achieve *eudemonia*, 'happiness', 'success',

‘fulfillment’ – in other words, human well-being. Moral development and politics are interwoven. It is the polis Aristotle had in mind when he imagined the natural condition for being human to be the public life of the citizen in the city. The polis was a place open and amenable to the conduct of being human³². Hannah Arendt draws from this understanding of the polis when she says: “To be political, to live in a polis, meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence”³³. Continuing, she says: “To force people by violence”, in the Greek sense of the term, “to command rather than persuade, were pre-political ways to deal with people, characteristic of life outside the polis, of home and family life, where the household head ruled with uncontested despotic power or of life in the barbarian empires of Asia, whose despotism was frequently likened to the organization of the household”³⁴. If we follow Arendt’s analysis we find that the state is not a means to protect society; its purpose is never to sustain the life process. Mastering the necessities of life exists, that is, “household life exists for the sake of the ‘good life’ in the polis”.

There is an extensive literature on the topic state and society, their relationship and distinction. The distinction between the state and society may be said to be first theoretically articulated by Hegel and the issue of the state and society is at the heart of the post-Hegelian world. It was Hegel who forcefully made the point that the ancient polis could not be a model for the modern state. According to Hegel, society is the center of freedom, choice and individual sovereignty while the state is that wherein force and freedom, authority and individual sovereignty are completed, cancelled and transformed into a unity. The demands of freedom takes us beyond the autonomistic forms of liberalism, where the individual and his goals are of ultimate importance, and the task of society is to permit their fulfillment. This idea of the state as the criterion for all other human conditions came to exercise a powerful fascination on contemporary thinkers of diverse persuasions, namely, Marx, Weber, Scheler, Croce, Schmidt, Spencer and so on. Despite the various differences among these

authorities, their basic understanding of state and society remains remarkably consistent with Hegel's formulation. Admittedly, on Hegel's theory, the distinction between society and state parallels the distinction between the private and the public. And there is a sense in which the state grows at the expense of the society, the former forcing the latter in a defensive and losing position. For Hegel, politics is the politics of inclusivity. There is a purpose instilled in us "to pursue each historical moment of concord until the contradictions within it become visible and compelling and then to forge new and higher forms of concord which express more fully both the essence of Being and the essence of humanity"³⁵. This is how Hegel scholar William Conally explains Hegel. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel reveals that the state is the final concord where human life is presented as an utterly ordered, seamless and rational sociality, without disruptions, tensions or arenas for the creative interplay and enhancement of difference. Hegel does not imagine a harmony; his dialectics forego harmony for unity. For him society is only an inferior moment in the course of sociality as it proceeds to completion and perfection in the idea of the state. The state is the realized society where the possibility of disruption is substantial from the value of its unifying dimension, "squeezing creativity, contestability and tragedy out of the sphere of the politics"³⁶.

From what has been said, state and society are terms to be used with care and discretion and also with some amount of uncertainty. The terminological differentiation of state (*Status Publica*) and society (*Communitas*) emerges concomitantly with the breakdown of the medieval polity and the emergence of the modernity. However, recent scholarship in the West has challenged this happier version of the separation of the state from society. Albert O. Hirschman has contended that a gradual separation of the idea of the state becomes possible when "a feeling arose in the Renaissance and became a firm conviction in the seventeenth and the eighteenth century that moralizing

philosophy and religious precept could no longer be trusted with restraining the destructive passions of man”³⁷.

It is supposed that liberation occurs from the fragmentation of authority as in state and society. It leads to better techniques for discipline and order, by harnessing human passions; the institutionlisation of the insane, the sick and the criminal was to the advantage of the dominant groups within modern western society. These enable the dominant group within society to maintain their power over society at large.

Recent Indian thought may be described as an interface of tradition and modernity. It is also a phenomenon of an ancient tradition coming to self-consciousness. The Indian tradition has continued through diverse contributions such as Hindu, Buddhist and Islam. With the colonization of the Indian subcontinent by the British the traditional awareness becomes conscious of another dimension of civilized life, more dynamic in nature as the aspirations for self-rule sought to realize itself in the political domain. It was a search for cultural self-identify that manifested itself in a manner of adjustment of the tradition with the modernity of the West. The West meant primarily British, and lately, France, Italy and Germany. The British Parliamentary system was a great lure. The French ideals of liberty and fraternity provided an impetus. In the wake of nationalism Italy and Germany came handy as sources of inspiration. Naturally, there occurred a consideration of the concept of state by leading cultural figures such as M.N. Roy, Gandhi, Tagore, Sri Aurobindo or Subhas Chandra Bose.

For a colonized consciousness the idea of the state tends to be utopian in nature. The lack of justice in the political identity and existence creates the longing for an ideal state. Naturally, the concept of state adumbrated by Indian thinkers in recent times has been markedly ethical in nature. But it should be

worth noticing a fact that utopia corrects political reality, and goes a long way towards providing a regulative model for practical statecraft.

The foregoing considerations are noticeable in the following thinkers – Gandhi, Aurobindo, M.N.Roy, Tagore and to some extent in Subhas Chandra Bose. We propose to consider the political ideas of these thinkers, drawing attention to the state/society anti-thesis wherever possible.

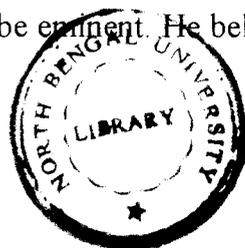
Gandhi looks upon colonisation as a form of violence, and offers us a vision of the nonviolent state based on the ethical principles of *sarvodaya*, and called it *Rāmrājya*, i.e. a society based on equity and welfare. The concept of state offered by Gandhi was non-authoritarian, non-coercive; in fact, he often speaks of the ‘withering away’ of the state. Further, his concept of state is based on the rejection of utilitarianism and base of the state is in the village unity, rather than in the cities. Instead of a centralised authoritative state Gandhi would rather advocate small self-governed units based on the virtues inherent in any good society.

Tagore’s notion of state is more social than political, and it is founded on the thesis that in India, it is *samāj*, and not the state which is the point of human unity. Therefore, he is opposed to the idea that state can be identified with the nation. As a spokesman of internationalism his is a critique of nationalism. In politics, his principles are harmony among the nations, cultures and creativity. Tagore lived in the times of national aspirations, and yet he stood for human values in politics and distinguished himself as a critique of nationalism.

Aurobindo started his career as a believer in the purification by blood and fire, and then sought to find politics on the spiritual manifestation of Godhead on the earth. His concept of history as fall from the spiritual immediacy and the gradual recovery of the lost spirituality is cyclic in nature. It is teleological in nature in so far as the goal of human unity is said to be eminent. He believed in

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the experience of a nation-soul in the manner of Hegel, and looked upon history as the manifestation of the divine in time.

M.N.Roy was initially drawn towards communism, but veered away to the political ideology of radical humanism. He rejects communism by espousing a sort of anarchy or absence of the state as a centre of political power. His notion of political paradigm is a “partyless democracy” to be brought about by a sort of renaissance.

In relation to the foregoing thinkers Bose’s thought patterns look more realistic. His psyche was mainly confined to the Indian context. Even his global perspective was mainly focused on his ultimate objective of India’s liberation. The modality of his approach was from a specific standpoint and not a world view in general like Tagore, Gandhi, Sri Aurobindo or Roy. He was more concerned with the criteria of a nation’s right to self-determination. The restoration of national dignity by liberation was his primary concern. Yet he kept his noticing gaze on the political state of affairs of the world and was got drawn into it.

The views of the thinkers sketched above exist on the regulative plans rather than the constitutive plane. Tagore’s concept of harmony, Aurobindo’s idea of human unity or Gandhi’s notion of *sarvodaya* are utopias, and could be used to correct political situations. The focus is the spontaneous creative unity of individuals in the development of the state, so that the ideal state would not be a seat of power and a centre of authority and regulation, but “a kingdom of ends” in Kant’s language, a condition where morality grows from reasoned recognition that one is fulfilling an obligation to oneself and others. Here, the concept of man dominates over the concept of power. That is perhaps why the ideal of Italian nationalism was dropped when it led to fascism.

We may note further that the ideal of society, rather than the state power exercises the greater hold on the minds of recent Indian thinkers as does on the modern mind in the West. However, despite the point of contact one should not be oblivious of difference in the ontological presupposition and philosophical

anthropology of the two cultures. Yet, a comparative study wherever possible is not without its merits as it enables one to cope with the anxiety and confusion about the concepts of society and state.

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Chapter II

State and Society *a la* Rabindranath Tagore

Rabindranath Tagore was first and foremost a poet and a visionary. Yet he had strong views on the political states of affairs of India of his time – the social and moral predicaments brought about by the British rule. He was also critical of the world political situation between the two world wars, and the rise of nationalism in India and the world outside. Tagore's political ideas are intertwined with his philosophy of history, ideas of social regeneration and human freedom. These are not accidental. Beneath the sub-soil of the Indian polity there was already an undercurrent of patriotism nourished by the message of the nineteenth century renaissance. The talk of humanism, free will and self-respect was very much in the air. It is no wonder that for a poet and humanist of Tagore's sensibility, it was not possible to remain aloof from the dawning political awareness of his time, and in fact he got drawn into it.

It is not easy to comprehend the thoughts of Tagore on the state. Varied as they are remaining scattered in many of his Bengali and a few English writings. But there are good works done on Tagore's political thought. Sachin Sen's of *The Political Thought of Tagore* has been a pioneering work. Another is Stephen Hay's *Asian Ideas of East and West: Tagore and His Critics in Japan, China and India*.

One may ask the question: Why should one get interested in the political views of a poet who was not a politician in the technical and professional sense, and who did not found a political school or launched a political party? We may very well recount the answer in the words of Sachin Sen who regards Tagore as a political thinker. He says: "Tagore had definite political speculations which are rich, multicolored, systematized and unconventional, and they call for serious attention in the perspective of world thought. He has made constructive

contributions to our political thought...”¹ Sen refers to Goethe who has described the role of the poet in the realm of politics “as a man and a citizen who will love his native land, but the native land of his genius lies in the world of goodness and beauty, a country without frontiers or boundaries...”² We may also add that a poet, in fact, all artists can provide an answer to what man can aspire for. Mathew Arnold³, while mourning the death of Byron, Wordsworth and Goethe, hails Goethe as “Europe’s sagest head” and, “physician of the iron age’, who undertakes pilgrimage for the “suffering human race”.

What better service could Rabindranath render to his countrymen than “to try to combat pernicious prejudice, open the narrow heart and enlighten the spirit for his people, purifying their taste and ennobling their thought”⁴?

Sen also says: “...it is the mission of a poet to inspire faith in the dream which is unfulfilled: without faith no future can be created. It is the dreamer who builds up civilisation: it is he who can realise the spiritual unity reigning supreme over all differences of race and not stumble over individual facts of separateness in the human world”⁵. Are all this not sufficient to study Tagore’s political thoughts?

Tagore’s political ideas do not tread the familiar and conventional path of tracing dynastic history or the exploits of conquerors and invaders. They fall within the domain of what we call the history of ideas – a history of the unfolding of man’s freedom. In one of his famous essays on “The Vision of India’s History”⁶, Tagore notes the inner tendencies of history; he would not accept the Orientalists’ view that the history of India is made out of wars, conquests, battles and dynastic intrigues and quarrels of rulers. Tagore draws our attention to the very basic fact that spirit of man, the creative impulse, is ever seeking unity and harmony among conflicting and contradictory forces. Tagore’s political ideology is based on the lessons of history or the history of India’s culture and civilisations. He explicated them in “A Vision of India’s History”. Tagore was not unaware of the clashes, conflicts and ravages of invasions in the

past, and he did not try to project or impute unity. What he did is to emphasise the element of synthesis, synthesis of various races and cultures – ‘a sea of humanity’ - the idea that the Indian mind remained unmoved in the midst of conflict and revolutions. This is achieved through a spirit of cohesion and synthesis of the narrow distinctiveness and the wide universality of man. Tagore saw the consciousness of a large multitude illumined with teachings of creative men, and he interpreted history accordingly. In his own words: “Let my heart be awakened gently in the sacred pilgrimage. Let it be awakened on the shore of the sea-like great soul of India. Standing on this shore I stretch my hands and salute the human god ... No one knows by whose call different forms of human life converged into this ocean in an irresistible flow; the Aryans and the non-Aryans, the Dravidian and the Chinese, the Saks and the Huns, the Pathans and Mughals merged with one body here”.⁷

We may refer to the view of Pabitrakumar Roy in this connection. He says: “In his study of India’s history Tagore accepts dialectics of development. The essence of dialectical movement is comprised by the existence of two mutually contradictory aspects, their conflict and their flowing together into a new category. This is how Marx has spelt out the concept of the ‘dialectic’. Tagore’s study of history does exhibit this scheme, but he is always aware of the fact that history presents a rich and variegated, and often inscrutable pathway of man’s journey through time”. It may be noted that Tagore’s idea of freedom is not freedom from external bondage; it is the freedom from one’s alienated existence. “History”, according to Tagore, “is the passage to freedom”. “It is freedom from the egoism, from the isolation of the self, from the fiercely intense sense of possession”. Indeed, Tagore has insisted on many different occasions and in many different ways that freedom lies in perfect harmony of relationship. In his words: “Only those may attain their freedom from the segregation of an eclipsed life who have the power to cultivate mutual understanding and co-operation. The history of the growth of freedom is the history of the perfection of human relationship”.⁸

Tagore accepted a social interpretation of history. In man's scheme of things society has a primacy. State is the specialised and professionalised aspect of society. In ancient India, there was a separation of the political and social spheres. Human energy was channelised through the home and *asramas*. The people lived their lives almost ignoring the state. Tagore writes: "In our country it was the king who was comparatively free and on the people was cast the burden of their civic obligations. The king warred and hunted – whether he spent his time in attending to matters of states or to his personal pleasures, was a matter for which he might be accountable to Dharma, but on which the people did not believe their communal welfare to depend".⁹

It will be futile to look for a Marxist critique of imperialism or capitalism in Tagore's perception of history. He interpreted the history of India without giving predominance to the productive forces of society, but with reference to the peculiarity of the social forces and relations. He approached history from a humanist perspective – imperialism had to be opposed and alien rule removed because these degrade the individual. Besides, these are alien to India's cultural pattern, which is not 'statist', but pro-society. Tagore's political notions thus are part of his historical perceptions and philosophical premises, and it is difficult to discuss them in isolation. They formed part of a totality of thought which embraced his understanding of man, history, society, philosophy and politics. As for the historical data, he falls back on the Hindu epics, myths and legends as well as customs and social institutions. For him, study of history is a study of society and social institutions and not of the political annals and state-craft. In India it did not matter whether the state was theocratic, autocratic or welfarist, but it had an ethical basis. No king was above the dictates of *dharma* or law governing him. He must fulfill his obligations as a righteous ruler. Politics was considered the 'master science', since dealing with *dharma*, it covered that vast range of human relationships that MacIver has so aptly termed 'the firmament of law'. In this sense, *dharma* was the creator of state and political science, if we

may use this word, i.e., 'political science' in respect to ancient Indian political affairs; it was more than a study of government. The sole purpose of governance was promoting the welfare of the people. Hence, positive law or politics was never a part of *Dharmaśāstra*-s. Even Kautilya in the final colophon of the *Arthaśāstra* made dharma the sole purpose of statecraft. The mixing up of *Dharmaśāstra*-s with *Rājanīti* occurred during the days of the Imperial Guptas when the statecraft had started to harden, and the *Dharmaśāstra*-s were active in incorporating parts of *Arthaśāstra*.

Another basic presupposition of Tagore's political ideas is his philosophical anthropology or concept of man. A distinction may be drawn between anthropology as a science and philosophical anthropology. Anthropology as a science is a systematic study of the physical beginning of man in the world, his biological evolution and the physical, cultural, historical and social development. Philosophical anthropology is about the concept of man; its central question is: What is man? The term 'philosophical anthropology' was introduced and the task of the discipline outlined by Max Scheler. According to him, philosophical anthropology is about the essence or essential structure of man. "It is the task of a philosophical anthropology to show exactly how, from the basic structure of human being, all the specific monopolies, creations and activities of man follow: language, conscience, crafts, weapons, ideas of justice and injustice, state, leadership, the representative functions of the arts, mythology, religion, science, historicity and sociality".¹⁰

The philosophical anthropology of Tagore views man as bi-polar. Man inhabits two worlds. In one, he is tied to the utilities, in another he is an 'angel of surplus'; he has two aspects, physical and universal, the finite and the infinite, material and the personal. Tagore never advocates the repression of the first terms of these polarities – the repression of man's individuality or his utilitarian motives and glorifying the terms of the other pole. But he believes that man can transcend his narrow self-hood and egoity, achieve universality, and realize his

personality. So freedom for Tagore is a dynamic concept; it consists in dialectic between the individual and the universal, between the finite and the infinite, between materiality and personality. That man's history is a history of freedom for Tagore, can be shown with reference to his views on the evolutionary process. He observes that a critical change is ushered in when man enters the scene. It signifies the entry of novel elements - elements of human imagination and creativity which are synonymous with freedom - in the stark uniformity of the evolutionary process. In *The Religion of Man*, Tagore says of man: "As an animal he is still dependent on Nature; as a man he is a sovereign who builds his world and rules it".¹¹

The most important difference between man and animal is that animals are bound within their limits, the greater of their power being necessary for self-preservation and preservation of the race. Animals too give expressions to feelings of love, anger, happiness, desires, etc. In animals these expressions are tied to usefulness, utility and survival. In man, though these feelings still have their roots in some original purposes, they have spread their branches far and wide in the infinite sky above the soil. That is why of all creatures man knows himself, feels his personality more intensely than other creatures. Let us dwell a little more on Tagore's idea of personality. It bears psychological overtones. We use this word to attach importance to some individual or group of individuals and to emphasize him or them. We say Mr. X has a strong personality or his personality clashed with the personality of his boss, or the mother's personality has a greater influence on the child. We must not confuse Tagore's concept of personality with the ordinary concept of it. The inner core of man's nature from which consciousness takes its direction to the world is personality for Tagore. Personality is a self-conscious property of transcendental unity within man which comprehends all details of facts that are individually his in knowledge, feeling, wish and will and also all world. In its negative aspects it is limited to individual separateness, while in its positive aspects, it ever extends itself in the

infinite through the increase in its knowledge. The negative aspects dichotomise human reality because it remains confined. Personality, understood negatively, leads to our alienation from others and the world, and confines us within the precincts of a limited hypostatized self. Tagore calls it *choto āmi*, the limited finite ego. Personality in its positive aspects takes man beyond such confinements. When Tagore speaks in terms of the dualities, physical-personal etc., he does not prescribe the annihilation of the first or submerging it in the second, rather he would speak of harmonising the two. This rounded off concept of man is the foundation of man's social consciousness, and his understanding of the processes of the world.

It is the freedom of man which creates a free state. This is the message of Tagore's *Swadeshi Samaj*. And this is backed up by his understanding of India's history. "Historically, in India the form of government has not been important, rather the triumph of the human ... the primacy of society persisted in spite of the rise and fall of kingdoms and empires".¹² Tagore made the very significant observation of how the common toiling mass remains unconcerned of the rise and fall of empires, wars and change of governments, and go on doing their work:

great multitudes I see...
moving with tumult,
along diverse paths in many a group from age to age,
urged by mankind's daily need of life, and in death.
They ever
pull the oars, keep holding the helm,
they, in the fields,
sow seeds, cut the corn.
They go on working.
The kingly sceptre breaks, the war drums
no longer resound:

Columns of victory gape, and blood-shot
 eyes and faces
 hide their annals in children's story books.
 They go on working,
 in Anga, in Banga, and Gujarat.
 The myriad hum of voices thunderous
 woven together, night and day,
 makes resonant the great world's livelihood.
 Sorrows and joys unceasing
 blend in chant rising to mighty hymn of
 On the ruins of hundreds of empires they go on
 working.¹³

The stream of the living history of India had flown on throughout despite her political vicissitudes. Hence, Tagore was insistent on repeating "that disaster can only overtake our country when its social body, the Samaj, is crippled. That is why we have never staked our all to resist a change of sovereignty, but have clung with might and main to the freedom of our Samaj".¹⁴ With the British conquest, the Samaj began to show cracks and to give way. To turn the tide we have to become our true selves consciously, actively and with our full strength.¹⁵

"*Samaja* is an ancient word, occurring in the Rgveda, and it connotes equality of its members, derived as the term is from *Sama*. Society then is the republic of selves. Freed from the shell of ego, the self realizes itself fully. Harmony, for Rabindranath, does not mean negation or exclusion of discord but transcendence of it".¹⁶ Tagore's vision of India's history is based on a distinction between truths and facts. He says: "The mark of truth is that everything comes under its purview. Despite an apparent discord or disorder in such convergence, there is a great harmony at the depth of it, or else it would have annihilated itself. But this symmetry is not there lying aside the disproportionate, it accepts the

disproportionate and then transcends it".¹⁷ It is from the fact that man can transcend facts into truth that society becomes possible. We may recall that that the *Swadeshi Samaj* was written in the context of an acute scarcity of water in Bengal in 1904. There Tagore pointed out that what distinguished British and Indian ideas of administration was that in the former, the state alone was responsible for state welfare – even the provision of alms to the poor. But, in India, this responsibility was, only partially, that of the ruler. Consequently, Tagore argued that if the king suddenly stopped providing assistance or if anarchy descended, society's education or pursuit of religious teaching did not stop abruptly. In developing this thesis in the *Swadeshi Samaj*, Tagore observed: "We are not strong where Europe is strong ... The source of strength is the State. The State has taken upon itself the responsibility of discharging all welfare efforts – the State distributes alms, the State imparts education, the State looks to the preservation of religion ... In our country society is the source of our welfare... India has not cast a look at kingdom; she has looked at her society".¹⁸ This belief in the primacy of the society and restriction of the functions of the state is consistent with Tagore's faith in the worth and ability of the individual.

The anti-state attitude of Tagore was bound up with the curbing of the state's power. He recognized that the political action was not the only means of human improvement; political state was not the only agency of expressing democratic will. The historical sense should inform every member of society to be actually conscious of his place in time, of his own contemporaneity, to understand the society in which he lives. Tagore returned to the same theme time and again during the early years of the last century by stressing the concept of social responsibility and its relation to the idea of *dharma*, the spirit of which he felt was essential for a rediscovery of India.

There was something moral in Tagore's concept of social responsibility. He derided excessive dependence on government, insisting that government stood outside of society, and to seek favour from it automatically implied conceding some amount of freedom to it. He anticipated that his ideas perhaps

would not be popular. Bengal was passing through a severe drought and Tagore's exhortation to self-reliance was often interpreted as unwillingness to demand anything from the Government. But he would not compromise, for his spirit was opposed to centralisation, bureaucracy and big government.¹⁹ "In order to reinvigorate Indian society, it was necessary to revive the spirit of integration, co-operation and understanding. These social traits could have their best expression in local self-government which should be made responsible for the welfare of its members. Rabindranath supported the idea of a decentralized and federative state wherein the regional units would be allowed to play a prominent role consistent with their larger responsibility".²⁰

Tagore's emphasis on society does not spring from the theory of non-state; it is tantamount to an anti-state attitude. The anti-state attitude of Tagore does not suggest that he was opposed to the state as such or that he considered the state to be an amoral entity. But he vehemently discarded power philosophy, and believed in taming of power. He wanted to put on embargo on the extension of the state's activities in every sphere of life. Naturally, this could be possible in a self-reliant society. He depreciated the tendency to look to the state for solving problems facing the community. In the essays in the collection *Atmashakti* (1901-05)²¹ Tagore often commented on the divergent rules in the India and Europe. He repeatedly asserts that India has nothing whatsoever to gain from importing the Western notion of state.

Tagore, we may say, is in the company of Bertrand Russell who believes that "if social life is to satisfy social desires, it must be based upon some philosophy not derived from the love of power". Russell says: "If I had to select four men who have had more power than any other, I should mention Buddha and Christ, Pythagoras and Galileo ... No one of the four would have affected human life as he has done if power had been his primary object. No one of the four sought the kind of power that enslaves others, but the kind that sets them free."²² State is that organisation where power is concentrated in the hands of a few. Tagore's distaste for all kinds of regimentation and bureaucracy is a

constant trend in his thought. While the essays in *Atmashakti* and *Swadesh* were written in the early part of the 20th century, his observation on the Soviet society following his visit to Russia in the twilight decade (1930) reflects this very continuity of his thought. Tagore was almost overwhelmed by the Soviet achievement. In his letters to his son Rathindranath and others²³ Tagore repeatedly gives expression to his almost unbridled enthusiasm for the great experiment, mentioning that a sea-change has been effected in merely thirteen years since the Bolsheviks came to power. But his eloquent praise is counterbalanced by his concern for the freedom of the individual. The drawback of the Soviet Russia was the incursion of the state in education. “They have made a mould with the education system. But humanity created in a mould does not last. If ideas of a live mind don’t match ideas of education, the mould is bound to disintegrate into pieces one day, men’s mind will become lethargic and die or they will become robots”.²⁴ Considering that this observation was made in 1930, Tagore’s words today sound almost prophetic.

A staunch believer of man’s progress to freedom and self-realisation, Tagore was against the manifestation of force in any form, be it state force or force used in challenging the state. He was not only against violence and terror as means for gaining freedom which is amply brought out in his novel, *Char Adhyay*. He was also against violent nationalism under the guise of patriotism. Rabindranath believed in the fellowship of men. He visualised the dawn of “the great federation of men”. Hence, he was averse to the concept of nationalism too.

Nationalism in the West, particularly in Europe, has often been thought to have a political relation to the Napoleonic conquest of Europe and to the break-up over the centuries of the Empire in Central Europe. It is more plausible to say that there emerged from the Napoleonic attempts at Europe, an association of nationalist and legal and political obligation and political identity. These are allegiances which are in some sense less than wholly political—matters of geographical, cultural and ethnic association. The motive is to find some binding

force among people that are stronger than any revocable agreement to the governed, wider than any merely personal affection, and sufficiently public to lend itself to the foundation of political institutions or laws. In India, nationalism developed in the context of colonialism.

Nationalism has been understood differently. We may distinguish three different senses. In one sense, nationalism concerns national identity. In that sense national identity claims that it may properly be a part of someone's identity that he belongs to this or that national grouping. Making our nationality an essential part of our identity, we are not doing something that is rationally indefensible. A person who in answer to the question: "Who are you?" says, "I am Indian" or "I am American", is not saying something irrelevant or bizarre. This proposition is a fairly modest one; it does not say that we are rationally required to make nationality a constitutive part of our personal identity, or that having a national identity excludes having collective identities of other kinds. Nor does it say that a person's national allegiances must always have a single object; it does not exclude a person's identifying herself as a Bengali, an Indian, pursuing a career in medicine, being a member of a music club, or an environment enthusiast, etc. "Identity" and its cognates like "identification", "to identify", etc. have a long history from the ancient Greeks through contemporary analytic philosophers. Identity is important not only because it contributes to make a man the kind of person he is and enriches his relationship with his fellows, friends and neighbours.

The second proposition about nationalism is ethical and claims that the duties we owe to our fellow-nationals are different from and more extensive than the duties we owe to human beings as such. That is not to say that we owe no duties to humans as such. But it is to claim that a proper account of ethics should give weight to national boundaries and that in particular there is no objection in principle to institutional schemes - such as welfare states - that are designed to give benefits to those living within its boundaries.

The third conception of nationalism is political. It is understood as a theory that a state (perhaps every state), should be founded on a nation, and that a nation should be constituted as a state. Hence, the attempt to uphold national identity is something more than nationhood; it involves not only terrestrial integrity, common language, custom and culture as essential to the idea of a nation, but also consciousness of these, as determining separate rights and allegiances. This consciousness is held to render intelligible and to justify the habits of strong association among members of a state. Not only that; it also signifies the sentiment and ideology of attachment to a nation and its interests.

It is surmised that Tagore would not be averse to nationalism conceived in the first sense. About the second, he would want to supplement ethical particularism with ethical universalism, and he would be opposed to the third sense of nationalism. His essay on *Nationalism*.²⁵ is a denunciation of nation and is 'prophetic' in character. Tagore's criticism of nationalism has to be read as a critique of nation-state. Tagore takes nation to be co-terminus with nation-state. Nationalism has an unwelcome connotation for Tagore when a nation makes a claim to a state of its own the bounds of nationality and bounds of state coincide. When this happens, obligations of nationality are strengthened by giving expression in a scheme of political co-operation; a formal scheme of political co-operation is superimposed on the national community. Perhaps, rights and obligations of citizenship coincide with rights and obligations of nationality. A nation-state not only fosters a fierce sense of national identity but also entails moral indifference to outsiders, to people beyond the national boundary. It proclaims the superiority of one particular nation and asserts that nation's right to trample upon others in pursuits of its vital interests. A nation coagulating into a state leads to the view that superior nations have the right of domination over weaker nations; it entails exclusive concern for one's own country, a desire that it should dominate others.

Tagore's Nationalism is no isolated treatise. It should be viewed in the light of Tagore's other socio-political writings, particularly the thesis of *Swadeshi Samaj*. Tagore's concept of nationalism has grown out of his anti-state point of view, and his argument is developed in terms of such opposites as organized and mechanical on the one hand and creative, spiritual and man on the other. These are the contrary categories of existence that Tagore seeks to harmonize. Tagore recognises that the word 'nation' cannot be translated into Bengali. In conversational language *jāti* refers to *varna* or *jāti* can be used to mean 'race'. He says: "I have no hesitation in accepting the word 'nation' (in Bengali) in tact. The idea we have derived from the British; I am prepared to acknowledge debt by retaining the word from their language".²⁶ The Indian nation was just in the making when Tagore penned these words.

In "What is a Nation"? (Nation Ki? in Bengali)), in which Tagore analyses the view of Renan (1820 - 1992) Tagore goes on to examine the many building blocks of a nation - territorial unity, centralized administration, linguistic affinity and ties of common market. But he concludes that while all these are relevant, nation, in the final analysis is "a state of mind", rather "a family of minds" not constrained by geographical limits. His definition of nation is the political and economic union of a people organized for a mechanical purpose. It is largely utilitarian and exploitative. The mechanical organization of people in pursuit of material aggrandisement is necessarily aggressive and imperialist in character. The nation is also the "least human and least spiritual". "It builds a civilization of power which makes it exclusive, vain and proud." One form of its manifestation, according to Tagore, is the colonisation and exploitation of people. "To the "nation", Tagore opposes "the world of personality", that is, all social relations that are not mechanical and impersonal.

In his essay on "Prachya O Paschatya Sabhyata", he writes: "the word Nation does not occur in our language, nor does it exist in the country. We have learnt of late to prize national greatness by virtue of European education. But its ideals cannot be found in our minds. Our history, our religion, our society, our

family, none of them has recognised the ascendancy of the cult of nation. Europe prizes political independence; we set store by spiritual liberation... it is clear that it's (the cult of Nation) ideals are not ennobling, they carry the evils of injustice and falsehood; there is a sort of terrible cruelty about the cult ... the basis of Hindu civilization is society; the basis of European civilisation is the State. Man can attain greatness either through society or through the state. But if we ever think that to build up the Nation after European pattern is the only way open and the only aim of humanity, we shall be wrong".²⁷

Besides the ideology of the *Swadeshi Samaj* and the poet's gigantic sense of history of the role of man in the making of history which led him to his own understanding of nationalism, there were also historical pressures behind Tagore's lectures on nationalism. The most important was the impact of the First World War. The outbreak of the First World War dramatically brought to the open the horrible implications of the latter. The catastrophic war called into question the universal humanity, which influenced Tagore deeply. However, the world war is not a central theme of *Nationalism*. It is rather ever present in the background as proof of the self-destructive tendency of the organised modern nation. Indeed, this perception intimates his whole argument. In his words: "This European war of Nations is the war of retribution. The veil has been raised, and in this frightful war the West has stood face to face with her own creation, to which she has offered her soul". The world war was the fulfillment of the necessary logic of aggressive western materialism, of science divorced from spirituality, by which the Nation will drag the greater part of the world "down into the bottom of destruction. Whenever power removes all checks from its path ... it triumphantly rides into its ultimate crash of death".²⁸

During his travels in Japan and the United States (1916-17), he warned in various lectures against these dangers. Nationalism was to him an ideology of collective selfishness. Its central pursuit was power at any price. It set people against people, and organized people by destroying their reason, conscience and creativity. Patriotism, he later explained, "is proud of its bulk. It would not

acknowledge a difference which is fundamental ... Power lies in number and extension. It talks of unity but forgets that unity is that of freedom. Uniformity is unity on bondage".²⁹ The immediate reception of Tagore's criticism of nationalism was mixed. The American Press was hostile. *The Detroit Guardian* warned the people against Tagore as corrupting the mind of the youth by sickly mental poison. Japan, where he initially received great ovation and appreciation as the poet seer from the land of the Buddha, turned cold when he cautioned them; his warning against the worship of the nation-state was virulently criticized. Within India, some of Tagore's contemporaries took exception to his remarks. For instance, some members of the Gadar party mistook his criticism as betraying the Indian nationalist aspirations.

Tagore's concept of nationalism is different from the modern concept of it, which takes into account the phenomenon of race, language, ethnicity, religion or nationalist myths. His anti-nationalism is related to anti-politics. This anti-politics implies primacy of civil society. Tagore conceives civil society as something distinct from and of stronger and more personal texture than political or economic structure. In Tagore's view despite successive invasions and conquests, civil society in India has survived as an organic reality. He holds that society as such has no ulterior purpose. It is an end in itself, a spontaneous self-expression of man as a social being. The cult of nationalism is sinful, he argues, because it forces individuals to surrender their personal wills into an abstract organisational will and to give their loyalties to its impersonal goals. He ever keeps his firm faith in the individuals who have made human ideals living in their personality. The human civilisations have their genesis in individuals, and they also had their protectors in them. Civilisation is the creation of great individuals. It has not been created by big institutions. When humanity is in peril individuals have helped it survive, and not organizations and institutions.

Besides Tagore's stated abhorrence to nationalism, there are explicit reference to it in his novels. Ashis Nandy,³⁰ who has scanned three of Tagore's novels, *Gora*,³¹ *Ghare-Baire*, (*The Home and the World*)³² and *Char Adhyay*,³³

says that “Tagore’s political concerns in the three novels did not change over the 25 years of his life that the writing of three novels spanned”.³⁴ The last one shows how passion of nationalism legitimizes violence inevitably leading to a loss of self and signification. Particularly in *Gora*, the protagonist comes out of the narrow confines of nationalism and transcends to a moral universe. During the hectic anti-partition campaign of 1904, Tagore was briefly drawn to join militant nationalists, but the experience produced a profound disillusionment. He soon discovered that the movement’s main inspiration was negative, violent and irrational. On such negative basis no just and open society could be founded. Gora, the protagonist of the novel, is a passionate advocate of Hindu revivalist nationalism. Although his experiences of the Hindu society are at variance of his beliefs, he nevertheless holds first to faith in an ideal Hinduism, and does not want to subject it to critical analysis. In the end, he is faced with the revelation that he was not a Hindu at all but the child of an Irish parent, brought up by a Brahmin and his wife as their child. Gora, then, finds his Hindu identity crumbling like a house of cards. He is nobody in the Hindu society. He realises himself as an individual only, whose allegiance is not to a particular community or tradition but his own sense of right and wrong. He declares: “In me there is no longer any opposition between Hindu, Mussalman and Christian. Today every caste of India is my caste. I can never be afraid of contamination even in the house of the lowest of castes.”³⁵

In *Ghare-Baire*, Nikhil, the hero of the novel, risks everything to live according to his humanist ideal; it wrecks his relationship with his wife and isolates him from the nationalist movement that turns violently against him. Tagore is trying to say that risks have to be taken if the human values are to be restored. Tagore could not get reconciled to the collective selfish ideology of nationalism. He was equally critical of patriotism. In his last novel, *Char Adhyay* (1934), he unfolds how the violent and secretive forces of extremist politics, may turn out to be tragic. The tragic ending is in sharp contrast to the hopeful ending of the earlier two novels. The common thread of the three novels is a critique of

militant nationalism coupled with colonialism and patriotism. This was sought to be achieved at a time when nationalism, patriotism and anti-imperialism were a single concept for most Indians. A recent critic, E.P.Thompson has suggested that Tagore employed the term nationalism to mean what we mean now-a-days by imperialism. What Tagore was ever trying to project is a self-definition transcending the geographical barriers of India.

It has been alleged that Tagore does not appear to have succeeded in suggesting ways of transcending the contradiction of nation and no-nation - the pursuit of dialectic which marks the general tenor of his thinking. But this is only apparent. The affirmation of the primacy of the social and personal freedom, in which Tagore saw the true basis of the individual's manifold relation with the society and the whole world, characterises Tagore's political thinking. He refuses to grant primacy to the political even when he was drawn in politics and it gives an obvious feeling of irony that his songs are sung as national songs and anthems of two nations, India and Bangladesh. He pleads for man to "have his new birth in the freedom of his individuality". "We must make room for MAN, the guest of this age, and not the NATION of this age, obstruct his path".³⁶ Tagore's outspoken stand against nationalism brought him into public controversy with Gandhi, but his commitment to individual freedom was not shaken. People in power are expected to pay attention to this.

In concluding this chapter, we may note that there is a certain datedness in Tagore's political theses. But it is an eye-opener. In spite of the protectors of peace and international understanding by organisations like the UNO, the promotion of International Law and Charter of Human Rights, states carry on their game of power politics. One does not have to look beyond Tagore's own land for a strong confirmation of the deleterious consequence of the party politics. The struggles for power and blind partisanship have marked our sense of justice, natural sympathies and the capacity for cooperation. This is not totally to deny the importance of politics. But a principle of people's politics should be to restrain the power of the state and stop it from assuming totalitarian control

over society. The capacity of the state, particularly the military state, for doing evil, is practically unlimited. The good that it can directly promote is far limited than what most people seem to realise. An essential prerequisite for any durable social improvement is to prepare public opinion in its favour. Mad men in power can today destroy the entire human civilisation. In the Buddha's time violence was only local. The Buddha's mission was removing local oppression. Today nuclear weapons have proliferated, and have reached a much larger number of nations. India too is not excepted. What is a matter of hope is that peace movements have started all over the world. They aim at raising the level of human consciousness in the world to a clearer perception of the unprecedented hazards ahead. Thus public opinion of a civil society is valuable to keep the state in check. Global movement for peace must learn to move in sympathy with struggle for freedom from a powerful state.

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Chapter III

Sri Aurobindo: Spiritual Anarchism

Sri Aurobindo's socio-political ideas are found in two basic texts: *The Human Cycle*, and *The Ideas of Human Unity*. But what is worthy of noticing is that in spelling out his metaphysics of Existence, the indefinite and illimitable Reality in *The Life Divine*, Aurobindo takes the phenomenon of the state in his stride. For Aurobindo there is no socio-political theory apart from and independent of his integral philosophy of evolution. Evolution for him is the unfoldment of the terrestrial categories of Mind, Life and Mind. With the appearance of Mind evolution has become self-consciousness leaving behind groping under the guidance of Nature. Mind, of course, is not the final term of evolution. Man, as a transitional being, has been destined to pass over to the realm of the supramental. In the passage from Inconscience to Conscience, and then to self-consciousness, man emerges as a mental being. As a mental being, man has to resist, as well as to transform, the pulls of his physical and vital natures. Man's reason is not fully illumined, for his mind, properly so-called is a sense-mind, and as such, his achievements have always fallen short of his aspirations, imagination and destiny, his divine freedom.

Aurobindo's socio-political thought is parasitic upon his metaphysics of evolution. The metaphysics is partly descriptive and in apart, revisionary. It is descriptive of the past achievements of man, and it is revisionary with respect to man's future evolution. Aurobindo's account of the future evolution of man is not an utopia. An utopia is a free floating idea of the imagination. It may be well argued like Plato's *Republic*, or be projected as something desirable as Thomas More's *Utopia*. As Aurobindo puts forward his thesis, it is futuristic, and has a necessity. The necessity is metaphysical, i.e., the Existence, Reality is involved in the terrestrial emergents, and reason itself is an emergent when the mental being of man unfolds itself in history.

The human cycle is a philosophical account of man's social development in accordance with the schema of distinct psychological stages. Aurobindo appropriates the schema of the German sociologist, Lamprecht and uses it to sketch his own socio-political intentions. The stages described through the schema are psychological and they form a cycle. The psychological cycle tells us of the inner meaning of the successive phases or the inner necessity of their succession, the term and end towards which they are moving. The cycle of society moves through, suggestively named, symbolic, typical and conventional, individualist and subjective stages.

Aurobindo admits that the psychology of man and his societies is too complex, and many-sided to satisfy any rigorous and formal analysis. But there have been in history the discoverable elements, main constituents and dominant forces operative in societies of the past, and these may be hoped to throw some light on the thickly veiled secret of man's historic evolution.

Human society in its primitive beginnings or early stages is marked by a strongly symbolic mentality that governed or pervaded its thought, customs and institutions. The symbol was of something which man felt to be present behind himself and his life and activities, the gods of the *Vedas*, for example, the vast and deep unnameable, hidden, living and mysterious nature of things. Man's religious and social institutions, at the symbolic stage of his social development, all the moments and phases of his life were to him symbols in which he sought to express what he knew or guessed of the mystic influences behind his life as shaping and governing or intervening in its movements. Man and the cosmos were both to the primitive (Aurobindo does not use the word in the sense in which it is used in anthropology though there are affinities) social man symbols and expressions of the same hidden reality. The symbolic attitude rendered everything in society a sacrament.

Out of this idea there developed a firm social order basing upon temperament and psychic type. The temperament and psychic types enjoined ethical discipline, social and economic function. The ethical motive and social

discipline governed the society. This stage of social development is named typical, and it created social ideas, and the ideas of social honour, and with the passing of time these ideals become a convention. In the end they remain as a tradition in the thought of the people.

The typical, says Aurobindo, passes into the conventional stage when the external expressions of the social ideals become more important than the ideals themselves. In the evolution of caste in India the outward supports of birth, economic function, religious ritual and family custom began to exaggerate enormously in proportions. The tendency of the conventional age of society was fix, to arrange firmly, to formalize a rigid system of grades and hierarchies, to bind everything social and personal to a traditional and unchangeable form. A survey from the symbolic through the typical to the conventional stages would reveal the fact that gradually the form prevailed and the spirit receded and diminished. When the gulf between the convention and the truth became intolerable there arose the individualistic age. It was the age of protest, of reason and revolt ushering in freedom from dead conventions.

Aurobindo sets a great value on the individual when all the old, general standards had become bankrupt, and could no longer give any inner help, when the conservation of the social mind lived only by the force of custom and attachment to the form, it is the individual who has to become a discoverer of the true law of the world and of his own being.

In Europe the individualistic age was inaugurated by a revolt of reason, which culminated in a triumphal progress of science, Individualism is always a questioning, a denial. According to Aurobindo, the culminating movement of European civilization was the attempt to govern and organize human life by verifiable science, by a law, a truth of things, which all can observe and verify, and to which all may freely, rationally subscribe. This has been the fulfilment and triumph of the individualistic age of human society. Science provided a standard, a norm of knowledge, and a rational basis for life. It outlined a clear

and sovereign means for the progress and perfection of the individual and the race.

But the triumph of the individualistic age spelt also the cause of the death of individualism. The individual discovered universal laws of which the individual is almost a by-product and by which he must necessarily be governed. The attempt to govern the social life of humanity in conscious accordance with the mechanism of the laws of science led logically to the suppression of the very individual freedom which made the discovery of the laws. Aurobindo observes, "In seeking the truth and law of his own being the individual seems to have discovered a truth and law which is not of his own individual being at all, but of the collectively, the pack, the hive, the mass."¹ This is a remarkable insight, which shows how irresistibly the mankind came to be driven to a new ordering of society by a rigid economic or governmental socialism in which the individual, deprived again (earlier as in the conventional stage) of his freedom, in his own interest and that of humanity. In place of the religio-ethical sanction there was now a scientific and rational or naturalistic motive and rule, the scientific, administrative and economic expert. There now stood, not the king, but the Collectivist State. This line of social evolution had been evident in Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, and Communist Russia. Aurobindo calls them "Scientific State" which institutes a new typical order based upon purely economic capacity and function. However, the inhibition of individual liberty into a system of rationalistic conventions gets rapidly petrified. A new individualist age of revolt seeks to break the static order by the principles of philosophical anarchism.

In the mean time a new view of the human being appears on the horizon. Rationalistic physical science overpasses itself, and appears to be overtaken by a flood of psychological and psychic knowledge compelling the new view. The age of Reason is drawing to an end. Novel ideas such as Nietzsche's Will-to-live, Bergson's exaltation of Intuition above intellect have begun pointing to another mental poise, and promise to give the succession of the individualistic

age of society not to a new typical order, but to a subjective age, which will not be in favour of any reordering of society on the lines of a mechanical economism. The individualistic age in Europe discovered the individual, and along with it the democratic conception of the right of all individuals as members of the society to the full life and the full development of which they are individually capable. The idea has come to stay that social development and well being mean the development and well being of all the individuals in the society, and not merely a flourishing of the community in the mass. Individualism has discovered the deeper truth that "The individual is not merely a social unit; his existence, his right and claim to live and grow are not founded solely on his social work and function... he is something in himself, a soul, a being, who has to fulfill his own individual truth and law as well as his natural or his assigned part in the truth and law of the collective existence".²

At this stage Aurobindo's metaphysics of the future comes in: the coming of the subjective age. In keeping with the premises of his evolutionary integralism the need of a developing humanity is not return to its old ideas. Its need is to progress to a larger fulfillment, the old is to be taken up on the way, and *transformed* and *exceeded*. The descriptive and the revisionary aspects of Aurobindo's metaphysics are closely linked together. The underlying truth of things is constant and eternal, but its mental figures, its life forms; its physical embodiments call constantly for growth and change. It is worth reminding ourselves of Aurobindo's view of man. Man, he says, is a mental as well as a physical and vital being and even much more essentially mental than physical or vital. There are two aspects: one, man's "subjective secret", and the other, the objective forms of man's psychological demand on life. Man's economic state and social institutions are governed by his psychological demands. His psychology is strongly affected and limited by his physical being and environment, but it is not at its roots determined by them, but constantly reacts and subtly determines their action, effects even their new-shaping. Therefore, to

find the truth of things and the law of his being in relation to that truth man has to go deeper and fathom his subjective secret.

‘Subjectivism’ is a term of deeper significance in Aurobindo’s discourse; it is invested with serious metaphysical import. Aurobindo suggests that in man’s study of himself and the world the power of the critical and analytical reason is not of much avail, sooner or later he has to come face to face with the soul in himself and the soul in the world. Man can only know himself entirely by becoming actively self-conscious and not merely self-critical, by more and more living in the soul and acting out of it. Subjectivism is the ideal of intuitional knowledge and a deeper self-awareness. The cycle of society brings home the realization that the utilitarian standard should give way to the aspiration towards self-consciousness and self-realisation. There is “veiled law and Will and Power active in the life of the world and the inner and outer life of humanity”.³

Aurobindo reads the history of world as moving from the rationalistic and utilitarian period of human development created by individualism to a subjective age of society. The materialism of the nineteenth century gave place to the vitalism of Nietzsche. His theory of Will to be and Will to power was a pluralistic and pragmatic philosophy. As Aurobindo explains, Nietzsche’s thought was pluralistic in the sense that it had its eye fixed on life rather than on the soul, and pragmatic in interpreting being in the terms of force and action. These tendencies of thought were influential in Europe before the First World War. The message of Nietzsche’s thought implied a reading of and living by the Life-Soul of the universe. It was not mere recoil from intellectualism to life and action. The Nietzschean message was deeply psychological and subjective in its method, and proposed a new intuitionism seeking “through the forms and powers of life for that which is behind life” laying hands “on the sealed doors of the spirit”.⁴

Aurobindo’s reflections on the First World War are significant in this context. The vitalism of the West was unenlightened by a true inner growth of the soul, and made unbridled demand upon life. The falsely enlightened vitalistic

motive-power had engaged intelligence and reasoning and the genius of an accomplished materialistic science as its instrument. The lesson of the war called for a new subjective and psychic dealing of man with his own being. Subjectivism is a road of return to the knowledge that man is inwardly a soul and a conscious power of the Divine. The evocation of the real man within is the right object of all human life. The ancients of the symbolic stage of society sought to express the truth through their symbolism, "First deepening man's inner experience, restoring perhaps on an unprecedented scale insight and self-knowledge to the race, it must end by revolutionizing his social and collective self-expression".⁵

Historically man's ideas concerning the relation of individuals and those of social development have been largely rationalistic and materialistic, only vaguely touched by the deeper subjective tendency. Comparatively, his "collective self-consciousness" in the "organic mass of his life" had been firmly developed. Nation is the name of man's collective self-consciousness.

The individual, for Aurobindo, is a living power of the eternal truth, a self-manifesting spirit. The individual is not merely the ephemeral physical creature, a form of mind and body that aggregates and dissolves, but a being. It strives always and rightly at self-formulation, to discover within the law and power of its own being, and to fulfill it. Likewise, the society, community or nation too is a being, a living power of truth. The primal law and purpose of a society or community or nation is to seek its own fulfilment, to strive rightly to find itself, to realise all its potentialities. "The nation", says Aurobindo, "like the individual, has a body, an organic life, a moral and aesthetic temperament, a developing mind and a soul behind all these signs and powers for the sake of which they exist"⁶

It is more than a parallelism between the individual and collectively as the nation, it is "a real identity of nature", says Aurobindo. As he views it, the nation is a "group soul". His view of the collectively vis-à-vis the individual is not an organismic theory *simpliciter*. The nation is not an association of merely vital

subconscious cells; rather it has a great number of partly self-conscious mental individuals for its constituents. The group-soul of the nation is objective as and when it centres round its geographical aspect. There may well be a passion for the land in which we dwell, but the land is only the shell of body, a very living shell, though more real body is the men and women who compose the nation-unit. So even the physical being of society is a subjective power, not a mere objective existence. The nation, in its core, is a great corporate soul.

Yet it was the objective view of society that had ruled the historical period in the West. In the East it had not been absolutely engrossing as in the West. The individual was the one and only subjective and psychological force. The nation was always understood in terms of its political status, extent of its borders, its economic well-being and expansion. Political and economic motives have predominated on the surface and history has been a record of their operations and influence. Aurobindo notes that a vague sense of subjectivity was indeed there, but it was an “objective sense of subjectivity”. In this the nation was no exception; in point of fact all communities displayed the characteristics. Aurobindo gives the example of the church, which is an organized religious community. Religion, he says, ought to be subjective. It is a paradox that the church insists on things objective, rites, ceremonies, authority, dogmas and forms of belief, and less on realizing the soul. The whole external religious history of Europe is replete with “religious” wars, persecutions, rivalries between the state and churches and all that is the very negation of the spiritual life.

As a corrective, Aurobindo proposes the phrase, “the nation-soul”, the soul of a nation. He refers to the Swadeshi movement of 1905 in Bengal which pursued a new conception of the nation not merely as a country, but a soul, a psychological and a spiritual being. Nationalism founded subjective view of the collective, issues in the form of the formula “to be ourselves”, rather than to become like others.

To become like others as the motive of the national life opens the way to great dangers and errors. Subjectivism can be true as well as false. The false Subjectivism mistakes the ego for self. It tends to transform the error of individualistic egoism into the momentous error of a great communal egoism. This reminds us of what Rabindranath had cautioned us almost the nationalism in the West. He spoke of nationalism as an international menace, what has come to be known as imperialism in a later day discourse. "Guided by a false subjectivism", Aurobindo comments, "we exhaust ourselves and corrupt ourselves in the dangerous attempt to live the destruction and exploitation of others."⁷ And "if the subjective age of humanity is to produce its best fruits ... the nations should become conscious not only of their own but of each other's souls and learn to respect, to help and to profit, not only economically and intellectually but subjectively and spiritually by each other".⁸

According to Aurobindo's line of thinking subjectivism is in its very nature an attempt at self-knowledge, and if we live without self-knowledge, men and nations would act and think egoistically. The only life known to them would be a life to self-ignorance, and hence they must live egoistically rather than not at all.

Aurobindo reminds us that only that which lives in its self-existence can endure. The true individual is not the ego, but the divine individuality which is through our evolution preparing to emerge in us. There is the "psychic truth" that the individual is not only himself, but is in solidarity with all of his kind. "That which we are has experienced itself through the individual, but also through the universality".⁹ As for the issue concerning the relationship of the individual and society, Aurobindo champions the cause of the individual. "The society has no right to crush or efface the individual for its own better development of self-satisfaction; the individual, so long at least as he chooses to live in the world, has no right to disregard for the sake of his own solitary satisfaction and development his fellow-beings and to live at war with them or seek a selfishly isolated good. And when we say, no right, it is from no social, moral, or

religious standpoint, but from the most positive and simply with a view to the law of existence itself. For neither the society nor the individual can so develop to their fulfilment. Every time the society crushes or effaces the individual, it is inflicting a wound on itself and depriving its own life of priceless sources of stimulation and growth.”¹⁰

True subjectivism teaches that we are a higher self than our ego, that we are in our life and being not only ourselves but all others. Accordingly, the individual does not stand in alienation from the universal, there is a “secret solidarity”. Our real “I” is a Supreme Being – this is lesson of, what Aurobindo has elsewhere called, the real Vedānta. That being is one in all, expressed in the individual and in the collectivity, *Vyāsti* as well as *Samasti*. Aurobindo argues that the two truths apply not only to the individual but to the nation. In the closing chapter of *The Life Divine* the point is put with a wider emphasis. “There is a Reality, a truth of all existence which is greater and more abiding than all its formations and manifestations ... Humanity is a formation or manifestation of the Reality in the Universe and there is a truth and self of humanity, a human spirit, a destiny of human life. The community is a formation of Reality, a manifestation of spirit of man, and there is a truth, a self, a power of the collective being. The individual is a formation of the Reality, and there is a truth of the individual, an individual self, soul or spirit that expresses itself too in something that goes beyond mind, life and body, something even that goes beyond humanity ... The individual as spirit or being is not confined within his humanity; he has been less than human, he can become more than human. The universe finds itself through him even as he finds himself in the universe ... He is not confined within the community; although he’s mind and life are, in a way, part of the communal mind and life. There is something in him that can go beyond them. The community exists by the individual, for its mind and life and body are constituted by the mind and life and body of its composing individuals ... the individual is not a mere cell of collective existence; he would not cease to exist if separated or expelled from the collective mass. For the collectivity, the

community is not even the whole of humanity and it is not the world; the individual can exist and find himself elsewhere in humanity or by himself in the world. If the community has a life dominating that of the individuals which constitute it still it does not constitute their whole life. If it has its being which it seeks to affirm by the life of the individuals, the individual also has a being of his own which he seeks to affirm in the life of the community. But he is not tied to that, he can affirm himself in another communal life, or, if he is strong enough, in a nomad existence or in an eremite solitude where, if he cannot pursue or achieve a complete material living, he can spiritually exist and find his own reality and indwelling self of being.”¹¹

The rather extensive citation is justifiably important as a testament of spiritual individualism. This has led one Indian philosopher, Daya Krishna to remark that what Karl Marx has done for the collective, Aurobindo does the same for the individual. Of course Aurobindo takes great care in distinguishing his version of individualism from the Nietzschean variety of the creed which was more vital and unilluminated than spiritual.

As a matter of social development of humanity the human collectivity does exist, but it is an inchoate and unorganized existence, though it realizes the purpose of Nature. All self-conscious egos are in a state of war, overt or covert, complete or partial. The survival of the best secures the advance of the race. The collective ego of the nation looks upon the individual as a cell of the collectivity, and makes his life entirely subservient to the life of the nation. He is made efficient by education, discipline, training and subordinated activity, as a part of the machine or a disciplined instrument of the national life. The vague collectivity gradually gets organized, self-conscious and emerges as the State. The collective ego gets concentrated and brings itself to the highest pitch of strength in the State.

The cult of the State is an error, a mistaking of the equi-polarity of the individual and the collective. On the credit side the collective in the form of the State gained an immense collective power, a certain kind of perfection and

scientific adjustment of means to end, and a high general level of economic, intellectual and social efficiency. But on the debit side the State begins to lose “all that deeper life, vision, intuitive power, force of personality, psychical sweetness and largeness which the free individual brings as his gift to the race”¹². The state arrogates to itself a supreme status, the highest realized functioning of human existence, or what Hegel said of Napoleon, when he invaded Germany, “the walking shadow of God upon earth”. The modern cult of the State commends a right to obedience, the unquestioning service and the whole activity of the individual. The service of the state and community appears to assume the absolute rule of morality. No rebel egoism is allowed, for the individual ego must be lost in the ego of the State, or become part of it.

As for the relation between one State and another, to other collective egos, it is a matter of perpetual war of strife between sharply divided egoism each seeking to fulfill itself. Aurobindo writes, “War then is the whole business of the State in relation to other States, a war of arms, a war of commerce, a war of ideas and cultures, a war of collective personalities each seeking to possess the world, or at least to dominate and be first in the world”¹³. Though the observation is based on a study of the post-first world war scenario in Europe, yet there has not occurred any substantial change of atmosphere. To make matter worse the entire concept of public morality has undergone a sea change. As Aurobindo remarks sardonically, there does not seem to be any morality except that of success, and insufficiency, incompetence, and failure are the only immorality. Every method is justified in the military success of the State. Even peace between nations is only a covert state of war. War and commerce are the two determinants of the modern world. War is the means of physical survival and domination, and is the means of economic survival; it is in fact another form of war. War and commerce then are the two aspects of the modern man’s struggle to live, one physical, the other vital. Materialistic science (*apropos* the Materialist’s denial in *The Life Divine*, and that the life and body are the whole

of the existence) has taught us that there is no soul. For Aurobindo both Matter and the Spirit are the two terms of existence.

Aurobindo offers a deep and probing analysis of the two views of life: the objective and the subjective. Following upon the Age of Reason under the aegis of a materialist interpretation of science we have had enough of war and the cult of collective ego in the form of the State. Yet the nîsus of spiritual is at work, and we stand at the threshold of the subjective age.

The subjective view of life begins with individualism. The principle of individualism is the liberty of the human being regarded as a separate existence to develop himself and fulfill his life. This liberty admits no other limit except the obligation to respect the same individual liberty and right in others. The balance of this liberty and this obligation entails in effect a harmony of compromises between right and duties, liberty and law as the scheme of both of the personal life and the society. The life of nation in the age of individualism also made liberty the ideal, and strove, with doubtful success, to affirm a mutual respect of each other's freedom as the conduct of nations to one another. In this idea of life, each nation has the right to manage or mismanage its own affairs freely, not to be interfered with in its rights and liberties as long as it does not interfere with the rights and liberties of other nations. But the egoism of individual and nation does not wish to abide within these bounds, and hence the social law of the nation under the name of the international law was developed (be it League of Nations or the UNO) into an effective force which will restrain the egoism of nations as the social law restrains the egoism of the individual.

The growth of modern science encouraged an idea of exaggerated individualism in the form of vitalistic egoism, an opposite ideal of collectivism. All living is said to be a struggle to take the best advantage of the environment for self-preservation and self-aggrandisement. This aspect of modern knowledge encouraged a gospel of the right for each to live his own life, not merely by utilizing others, but even at the expense of others. Certain forms of anarchism and imperialism have been influenced by this type of ideas. The individual is to

survive by becoming strong, efficient and powerful to dominate his environment and his fellows, and the aim of this egoistic line is to reap his full measure of enjoyment.

Yet this is not the only teaching of the modern science. It also discovered that Nature seeks to preserve the type, not the individual, that the individual life is best secured and made efficient by association with others and subjection to a law of communal self-development rather than by aggressive self-affirmation. In Nature's scale of values, the pack, herd, hive and swarm take precedence over the individual animal or insect and the human group over the individual human being. Modern collectivism derived great impetus from such a lesson of science, and it affirmed the entire subordination of the individual to the community, nation or state. Equally forceful has been the egoistic affirmation of the individual nation as against others or against every group or all the groups of nations which constitute the totality of the human race.

After having traced the two-fold source of the modern political climate Aurobindo points to the conflict between the idea of a nationalist and imperialist egoism and the doctrine of individual and national liberty. Out of the dialectic of the two, he says, there looms the possibility of the birth of the new idea of human universalism or collectivism of the race. This new ideal, he hopes, would overcome both national separatism and liberty. This idea demands of the nation that it shall subordinate its free separateness to the life of a larger collectivity, which may be an imperialist group or a cultural unity, or the total united life of the human race.

It is in this perspective that Aurobindo proposes the principle of subjectivism. He argues that subjectivism and objectivism start from the same data, the individual and the collectivity. Both of these are of complex nature as regards the powers of the mind, life and body, and both seek the law of their fulfillments and harmony. But objective view of life proceeds analytically, takes an external and mechanical view of the entire issue by looking at the world as a thing, an object. Reason, in its objective employment places itself outside

observed process. The laws of the process are considered as mechanical rules or settled forces acting upon the individual or the group. So the state is viewed in modern political thought as an entity in itself as if it were something apart from the community and its individuals. The state is viewed as having the right to impose itself on the individuals and control them in the fulfilment of some idea of right, good or interest. Life is to be managed, harmonized, perfected by an adjustment, a manipulation, machinery through which it passed and by which it is shaped. An individual reason may discover and determine the law, it may be enforced by the individual will, and objectivism regards the law as ever outside oneself, a mechanical power of management, ordering and perfection. This is the conception of perfection according to the objective view of life.

Subjectivism or the subjective view of life, on the other hand, proceeds from within and regards everything from the point of view of a “containing and developing self-consciousness”. The law of life is neither outside nor mechanical, it is within ourselves. In terms of the subjective view of life, life is a self-creating process, passing through sub-conscious, half-conscious, and at last fully conscious of our potentiality. Subjectivism is the principle of the self’s progress in “an increasing self-recognition, self-realisation and a resultant self-shaping manner”¹⁴. Reason and will are only the effective movements of the self. Aurobindo views reason as a process of self-recognition, and will a force for self-affirmation and self-shaping. Reason and will are only a part of the means by which we recognize and realize ourselves.

Subjectivism, as Aurobindo formulates it, takes a large and complex view of human nature, away from the external and objective method. “The whole impulse of subjectivism is to get at the self, to live in the self, to see by the self, to live out truth of the self internally and externally but always from an internal initiation and center”¹⁵.

There remains of course the question concerning the truth of the self, and its real abiding-place. Subjectivism has to deal with the same factors as the objective view of life and existence. There are two possibilities. Either one may

concentrate on individual life and consciousness as the self and regard its power, freedom, satisfaction and joy as the object of living, or may stress on group consciousness, the collective self. One may see man only as an expression of the group-self, and hold that in his individual being man is necessarily incomplete; he becomes complete, only by the larger entity. Therefore, one would wish to subordinate the life of the individual to the power, efficiency, knowledge, happiness and self-fulfillment of the race, the life and growth of the community. In this view a “righteous oppression” on the individual could be claimed, and he may be taught that he has no claim to exist, no right to fulfil himself except in his relation to the collectivity. The collective self-consciousness then begins to invade at every point the life of the individual, refuses to it all privacy and apartness, all independence and self-guidance.

Aurobindo develops the logic of collectivism, as it may develop from the premises of so-called objective view of life. But he goes on to suggest that we may enlarge the idea of the self in the manner in which science sees a universal force of nature, the one reality and of which everything is the process. Accordingly, one may subjectively realize a universal Being or Existence which fulfils itself in the world and the individual and the group (*Vyāsti* and *Samasti*) with an impartial regard for all as equal powers of its manifestation.

Aurobindo appears to favour the view that neither the separate growth of the individual nor the all-absorbing growth of the group can be the ideal. His integral practical view puts forward “an equal, simultaneous, and as far as may be, parallel development of both, in which each helps to fulfil the other.”¹⁶ The integral, political view holds that each being, the individual and the collective, has his own truth of independent self-realisation in the life of others. The individual grows in largeness and power in the harmonious growth of all the individual selves and all the collective selves of one universal being. Properly viewed, these two would not be separate or opposite, but the same impulse of the one common existence. For Aurobindo, the individual and the collective are

“companion movements”, separating only to return upon each other in a richer and larger unity.

What then is the ideal law of social development? Science has informed us about our past physical and vital evolution. But, Aurobindo adds to it man’s future mental and spiritual destiny. In this adventure the role of the individual becomes immensely important.

Much depends on Aurobindo’s metaphysics of man, according to which man is a mental being in Nature, and having arrived in Nature through mind he has to pass over to what is beyond mind – the Self or the Spirit which expresses itself in all Nature. Hence in Aurobindo’s turn of the phrase, the law and nature of human existence is to fulfill himself in God, and to fulfill God in the world. Both himself and the world is the destiny of man and the object of his individual and social existence. A lonely salvation cannot be man’s complete ideal. Given the companion movements of the individual and the collective, each fulfilling itself in the other, it follows that the object of all society should be to provide the conditions of life and growth by which the individual man may travel towards the Divine perfection. The word “Divine” in Aurobindo’s context denotes the deity, not any theological godhead. The evolution proceeds by cycles, and each cycle has its own figure of the Divine in man to express in the general life of mankind the joy, beauty, harmony of the self that has been attained, and pours itself out in terms of its regulative images. Aurobindo mentions two conditions of “healthy progression and successful arrival”¹⁷, namely, freedom and harmony. To him, these two are necessary principles of variation and oneness. What Aurobindo means is the freedom of the individual, and the group, as well as coordinated harmony of the individual’s forces and the efforts of all individuals in the group. To realise and to combine the two - freedom and harmony vis-à-vis the individual and the group - is a difficult task, and yet this had been the effort of mankind throughout history. Aurobindo observes that the effort to realise freedom and harmony “cannot be done brutally, heavily, mechanically in the mass; the group self has no right to regard the individual as if he were only a cell

of his body, a stone of its edifice, a passive instrument of its collective life and growth. Humanity is not so constituted. We miss the divine reality in man and the secret of the human birth if we do not see that each individual man is that Self and sums up all human potentiality in his own being. That potentiality he has to find, develop, and work out from within. No state or legislator or reformer can cut him rigorously into a perfect pattern; no Church or priest can give him a mechanical salvation; no order, no class life or ideals can be allowed to say to him permanently, "In this way of mine and thus for shalt thou act and grow and in no other way and no further shall thy growth be permitted". These things may help him temporarily or they curb and he grows in proportion as he can use them and then exceed them, train and teach his individuality by them, but assert it always in the end in its divine freedom. Always he is the traveller of cycles and his road is forward"¹⁸. The cited passage is an impassioned charter of the freedom of the individual, and puts the individual at the center of the evolutionary map.

What is the content of the freedom Aurobindo has been talking about? How does it stand in relation to the laws, disciplines and ideals to which the individual is subjected when he lives in society? Aurobindo makes it clear that the individual's life and growth are for the sake of the world, but he can help the world by his life and growth only in proportion as he can be more freely and widely his own real self. The individual has to use the ideals, disciplines and systems of cooperation, but can use them well, in their right way and purpose if they are to him means towards something beyond them, and not as burdens or despotic controls to be obeyed as slave or subject. The only purpose of the variety of laws and discipline is to be instruments of the human soul, and "when their use is over they have to be rejected and broken"¹⁹. The individual has to gather in his material from the minds and lives of his fellow men, and make the most of the experience of humanity's ages, be it the religion or politics or the arts, and not to confine himself in a narrow mentality. The liberty claimed by the human mind for the individual is no mere egoistic challenge and revolt, it is the

law of the Self and its unfolding. Aurobindo's position is quite sophisticated. It is neither simple individualism nor it is pure organismic theory of society. Nor is it a halfway house between the two.

The position is made clear if we consider the following: Individual man belongs not only to humanity in general; he belongs also to his race-type, his class-type and his spiritual-type. In so belonging to various types he resembles some and differs from others. According to these affinities the individual tends to group himself in churches, sects, communities, classes, coteries and associations. He helps these groups, and at the same time gets him enriched. He enriches the life of the large economic, social and political group or society to which he belongs. Aurobindo notes that in modern times this society is the nation. But the individual is not limited and cannot be limited by any of these groupings. He is not limited by his nationality. If by a part of himself he belongs to the nation, by another he exceeds it and belongs to humanity. And by the same logic, even there is a part of him not limited by humanity, he belongs by it to God and to the world of all beings. The individual, says Aurobindo, "has indeed the tendency to self-limitation and subjection to his environment and group, but he has also the equally necessary tendency to expansion and transcendence of environment and groupings".²⁰ In associating himself with various groups the individual shares something of the infinity, free variation of the Self manifested in the world.

The community, Aurobindo points out, stands as the mid-term and intermediary value between the individual and humanity. The individual has to live in humanity as well as humanity in the individual. Humanity is too large an aggregate to make the mutuality hardly ever intimate. Therefore, the community has to stand for a time to the individual for humanity. This has something of Swami Vivekananda's idea that society is a reflex of the Universal Mother: "Forget not that thy social order is but the reflex of the Infinite Universal Mother-hood".²¹ There is of course a difference: the note of the emphasis on the individual is not as pronounced in Vivekananda as it is in Aurobindo. Aurobindo

mentions the possibility that the community may stand between the individual and humanity in such a fashion as to limit the reach of his universality and wideness of his sympathies. Hence the absolute claim of the community or the society or the nation over the individual is “an aberration of the human reason” just as the claim of the individual to live for himself egoistically is an aberration and “the deformation of a truth”.²²

The position taken by Aurobindo leads him to draw similar conclusions as regards the relation between communities and nations. A nation has the right to be itself and to its just claim. An attempt at domination by other nations or of attack upon its existence is equally a deformation of a truth. Rightfully a nation has the right to exist its existence, to insist on being itself. This right a nation must assert not for its own sake, but the interests of humanity. On the part of the community or a nation the right to be oneself does, limitations, imperfections, in the form and mould of its past or its present achievement, and refuse mental or physical commerce and interchange or spiritual or actual commingling with the rest of the world. For so, says Aurobindo, it can grow or perfect itself. “As the individual lives by the life of other individuals, so does the nation by the life of other nations”.²³ For both the individual and the aggregate, the rule of another nature imposed upon it by force is a menace to their existence, a wound to their being. The free development from within is the best condition for both the individual and the community. This is the common law, for the individual it is to harmonise his life with the life of the social aggregate, and pour himself out for growth and perfection of humanity; for the community or nation it is to perfect its corporate existence by taking advantage of the free development of the individual, and to respect and to aid and be aided by the free development of the other communities and nations, to harmonise its life with that of the human aggregate. For humanity the law is to harmonise its upward evolution, “to work towards the day when mankind may be really and not ideally one divine family”.²⁴ This is an ideal law, while human race is imperfect. Man does not possess himself, but is only seeking to find himself, the law of his own nature,

advancing by a tangle of truth and error, right and wrong, compulsion and revolt and clumsy adjustments. Aurobindo is well aware of the fact that owing to his egoistic nature man cannot even follow the ideal law of his being ideally. But the law has to be held before him, and find out the way by which it can become more and more the moulding principle of his individual and social existence.

It will have been noticed that for Aurobindo the individual is the index and foundation of man's whatever complex and larger unities like society or nation. Hence the development of the free individual is the first condition for the development of the perfect society.

Aurobindo views the political dimension of man's endeavour against the backdrop of human life. Human life is moved by two equally powerful impulses: individualistic self-assertion and collective self-assertion. Life works by strife as well as mutual assistance and united effort. There is both competitive endeavour and co-operative endeavour. It is from this character of the dynamics of life that the whole structure of human society has come into being. Aurobindo points to the difference between the Asiatic and European ideas of society. Life in society consists in three activities: the domestic, the social and the economic. The social life of man entails his customary relations with others in the community both as an individual and as a member of one family among many. Man's economic activities consist in his role as a producer, wealth-getter and consumer, and his potential status and action. Society is the organization of these three things and, fundamentally it is for the practical human being nothing more. Life itself is the only object of living.

Aurobindo observes that in Asia, the social aspect of life was more important than the political as it was in Europe. Asiatic mind valued its social organization, yet valued much more highly the spiritual heroes, the saints, religious founders and thinkers. In *Eastern Religion and Western Thought* Radhakrishnan too has made this point with special emphasis, namely, in India, the Hindus in particular, trace their descent from sages of the past, and the saint is honoured more than the king. There is another sort of difference, noted by

Aurobindo, between the ancient and modern outlook on society. The modern world has prided upon its economic organization, political liberty, order and progress, the mechanism, comfort and ease of its social and domestic life, and science, mostly for its instruments and conveniences, and invocations which help man to master the physical life. In contrast, Greece and Rome regarded life as an occasion for the development of the rational, the ethical, the aesthetic and the spiritual being. Art, poetry and philosophy were cherished as much as or even more than political liberty. Asia made these subordinate and looked upon them as stepping-stones to spiritual consummation. Between the ancient and the modern views of society there has come to a change in the attitude. On this a great deal hangs. For if the practical and vitalistic view of life and society is the right one, if society principally exists for the maintenance, comfort, vital happiness and political and economic efficiency; then the idea that life is seeking for God and for the highest self cannot stand. Aurobindo remarks that modern society acknowledges only two gods: life and practical reason organized under the name of science. The old existing forms of life, the family, the society and the nation are still there, and all these are governed by two impulses, individualistic and collective. The individualistic impulse makes family, social and national life a means for the satisfaction of the vital individual. The society is the field of the individual's expansion, less intimate than the family, but a larger expansion of himself, and the nation the field for the play of a remoter but still larger sense of power and expansion. The society is essentially economic in its aims, and takes up both the individual and the family into a more complex organism and uses them for the collective satisfaction of its vital needs and claims. And this, according to Aurobindo, accounts for the predominantly economic and materialistic character of modern ideas of Socialism. These ideas are the full rationalistic flowering of the instinct of collective life. Society is one competitive unit among many of its kind, its first relation with the others are always potentially hostile. And therefore, a political character is necessarily added to the social life.

This is an important insight of Aurobindo's analysis, and it shows how society comes to assume a political colour and grows eventually into a nation. If the political dimension of our social existence predominates, and the motives of collective existence are valued more than the others, the collective and cooperative idea of society would develop and culminate "in a huge, often monstrous overgrowth of the vitalistic, economic, and political ideal of life, society and civilization".²⁵

As a consequence, the higher parts of man's being that tend to the growth of his divine nature is taken hold of by the gigantic collective instinct of the nation or the state, and dominated and transformed into its own image. This rules out, in Aurobindo's words, "the idea of the Kingdom of God on earth, the perfectibility of society and of man in society".²⁶

But given the evolutionary nissus of Aurobindo's metaphysics, the instinctive and vital movements of life are infrarational, but the "great mass of vital energism" (this is Aurobindo's phrase) contains in itself the imprisoned supra-rational. The mark of supra-rational is the growth of absolute ideas. As Aurobindo conceives it, politics, which is apparently "a game of strife and deceit and charlatanism"²⁷, can be a large field of absolute idealisms. Patriotism, for example, is one such ideals, entailing worship, self-giving, discipline and self-sacrifice. Even the political ideas of monarchy, aristocracy and democracy, "apart from the selfishness they serve"²⁸ here had for their soul an ideal "a loss of itself in the idea"²⁹ making men ready to suffer and die for them. Even war and strife have been schools of heroism, and without heroism man cannot grow into the Godhead.

What does Aurobindo mean by "the Divine"? The Divine in life, he says, is "power possessed of self-mastery"³⁰, and mastery of the world. Hence in the Divine fulfillment there would be "oneness and the ideal of human unity"³¹. Aurobindo envisions and elaborates the notion of human unity in the form of world government in his *The Ideals of Human Unity*. The ideal of human unity may now be dim and far-off, yet the desirability of the possible state of affairs is

not altogether lost. The competitive nation-units appear to feel “the call to cast themselves into a greater unified cooperative life of the human race”³². Aurobindo believes that man is at the cross-roads of a new order and has its metamorphic quality and influence over humanity. It is also Aurobindo’s thesis that the ultimates of life are spiritual and only in the full light of the liberated self and spirit can it achieve them. The full light is not intellect or reason, because mind is only a middle term between inconscience and the supra-mental. Man’s life and existence is ever disturbed by a pull from below and a pull from above. “There is the pressure on human life of an Infinite which will not allow it to rest too long in any formulation.”³³ The political formulations so far have been vitiated by the unresolved tension and dialectic between the polarities of the individual and collective. “A spiritualised society alone can bring about a reign of individual harmony and communal happiness”, or “the government of mankind by the Divine in the hearts and minds of men.”³⁴

So we have followed Aurobindo’s analysis of man’s social evolution. It has, by the very logic of its growth, passed through three successive stages: the individualistic, democratic with liberty for its principle, then socialistic, a governmental communism with equality and the State for its principle, and finally the third, anarchistic in the higher sense of that word. From the stage of individualism to socialism there obtains the rule of reason, and life moves under the reign of theories. Anarchism, as Aurobindo understands it, is either a loose voluntary cooperation or a free communalism with brotherhood or comradeship and not government for its principle. Anarchism is the consummating shape of politics to come. It should be noted that when Aurobindo talks about anarchism, he is to be taken as pointing to a possibility, based upon his thesis concerning the individual. Both democracy and socialism are products of reason. Can reason be the master of our nature in solving the problems of our interrelated and conflicting egoism, and bring about a perfect principle of society? The answer can hardly be an emphatic ‘yes’. Aurobindo’s metaphysics has built-in critique of mind and its operation. According to Aurobindo the office of reason consists

in seeking to understand and interpret life by the symbol of the idea alone. It generalizes the facts of life in terms of its own ideative conceptions, and looks for its largest general applications. The truths of reason are possibilities, they are ideal truths. They cannot be applied immediately in life. It is from this inherent characteristics that Aurobindo avers that the age of reason is always an age of progress.

There arises a universal questioning, for reason accepts no tradition merely for the sake of antiquity. It asks whether the tradition contains at all still any living truth for the governance of life. Reason does not go by any agreement unless the people are right in their agreement. Out of the universal questioning there arises the idea that society can be perfected only by the universal application of rational intelligence to the whole of life, to its principle, details and powers. Obviously, the reason cannot be the reason of a ruling class. Aurobindo has remarked that reason has been misapplied with a view to fettering it into the servitude of the ruling class and justifying the existing order. In the evolutionary state of affairs and presently prevailing infrarationality, ideas become disfigured in practice even if they come from pre-eminent thinkers. They become ineffective and altered into mere form and convention. Hence, reason must be the reason of each and all seeking for a basis of agreement. This is how the principle of individual democracy arises. The reason and will of every individual in the society must be allowed to count equally with the reason and will of every other in deforming its government. It follows then that each individual must be allowed to govern his life according to the dictates of his reason and will so far as that can be done without impinging on the same right in others.

But the ideal of individualistic democracy does not stand securely on metaphysical grounds. As Aurobindo points out, the ordinary man emerging from an infrarational past is naturally unable to form a reasonable judgment. He does not yet use his reason in order to come to an agreement with his fellows, but rather to enforce his opinion by struggle and conflict with the opinion of

others. His reason normally serves for the justification of his impulses, prejudices and interests.

Further, the individualistic democratic ideal brings us to the precarious rule of a dominant class in the name of democracy, over the ignorant and the numerous. And since the ideals of freedom and equality is abroad, the exploited masses are led to assert their right and to turn the democratic falsehood into the real democratic truth. A perpetual strife of parties surfaces itself. The present parliamentary scenario is previsioned by Aurobindo in terms that evoke wonder at his insight: “an impotent and sterilizing chaos of names, labels, programmes, war crises. All lift the banner of conflicting ideas or ideals, but all are really fighting out under that flag a battle of conflicting interests.”³⁵ This state of affair is not at all the perfection which the individualistic reason had contemplated as its ideal.

The transition from democratic individualism to democratic socialism appears as a possibility. Socialism, initially meant as uprising against the rule of the bourgeois and the plutocrat, has worked itself out by a war of classes. Socialism has taken a purely industrial and economic appearance. For Aurobindo, these are the accidents of its birth, but not its true nature. He says that socialism seeks rational ordering of society by getting rid of the unbridled competition which stands on the way of any decent ideal or practice of human living. “Socialism sets out to replace a system of organized economic battle by an organized order and peace.”³⁶

Socialism begins by questioning the democratic basis of individual liberty. Equality is not enough if it is only political. There has to be a perfect social equality, not only equality of opportunity for all but also equality of status for all. Equality is not possible to be there along with personal and/or inherited property. Socialism abolishes the right of personal property; all property is vested with and administered by the community as a whole. But Aurobindo points out that in order to justify this idea, the socialistic principle has to deny the existence of the individual or his right to existence except as a member of the

society and for its own sake. Again, socialism does not trust individual reason, and it is for the reason of the whole community to work out the right and rational adjustment of the individual's life with the life of others.

Democratic socialists have sought to build a half-way house between industrial freedom and the rigours of the collectivist idea. Aurobindo finds democratic socialism wanting in its logic and courage, and mentally poised between two opposing principles of socialistic regimentation and democratic liberty. The collectivist idea contains fallacies inconsistent with the real facts of human life and nature, and is eventually replaced by spiritual anarchism. It is a form of society founding an essential rather than formal liberty and equality upon fraternal comradeship in a free community.

Aurobindo analyses in depth the notion of liberty, and notes that it is individualistic in its origin, not native to the collectivist ideal. It is the individual who demands liberty for himself. The collectivist trend and the State idea are self-compelled to take up the compulsory management and control of the mind, life, will and action of the community until personal liberty is pressed out of existence. Similarly, it is the individual who demands for himself equality with all others. Aurobindo, notes further, that when a class demands equality it is still the individual multiplied claiming for himself and all who are of his own grade, political or economic status, an equal place, privilege or opportunity for those who have acquired or inherited a superiority of status. The social Reason concealed first the claim to liberty but in practice it admitted only equality before the law, which is helpful but not too effective to ensure reasonable freedom for all. When in course of time, the injustices and irrationalities of an unequalled competitive freedom creates enormous gulfs, the social Reason shifts to ground and tries to arrive at a more complete communal justice on the basis of a political, economic, educational and social equality – a plain level on which all can stand together. But in the end, it is after all an artificial liberty riddled with contradiction. Equality, like liberty, may turn out to be an obstacle in the way of

the best management and control of life by the collective reason and will of the community.

Aurobindo then focuses on the last of the democratic trinity, i.e., brotherhood or comradeship. This seems to square better with the spirit of collectivism, when liberty and equality disappear from the human scene. Aurobindo notes the paradox that evens the champions of the new social systems, who discard both liberty and equality as democratic chimeras, appear to encourage the idea of comradeship. But he goes on to remark that comradeship without liberty and equality can be nothing more than the like association of all – individuals, functional classes, guilds, syndicates, soviets or any other units – in common service to the life of the nation under the absolute control of collectivist state. The only liberty left at the end would be the freedom to serve the community under the rigorous direction of the State authority. The only equality would be an association of all alike in a theoretical sense in respect of civic service. And brotherhood would mean comradeship in devoted dedication to the organised social Self, the State. Aurobindo sums up the analysis by the following comment: “The democratic trinity stripped of its godhead would fade out of existence; the collectivist ideal can very well do without them, for none of them belong to its grain and very substance”.³⁷

According to Aurobindo, totalitarianism of some kind is the natural outcome of Socialism, or the collectivist idea and impulse. The essence of Socialism is the governance and strict organization of the total life of the society as a whole and in detail by its own conscious reason and will for the best good and common interest of all, eliminating exploitation by individual or class, removing internal competition. This may be taken as describing “Social Democracy”, as Aurobindo terms it. What is remarkable is that he considers the ideal as possible in a successful collectivist rationalization of society even by incorporating a democratic ideal. The sovietic structure in Russia had a democratic face in spite of the ideal of a proletarian equality for all in a classless society. The irony of the situation was that the spirit of the dictatorship of the

proletariate amounted, in fact, to the dictatorship of the Communist Party in the name or behalf of the proletariat.

In an oblique reference to Marx, Aurobindo assesses Marxism as “a rationalistic system worked out by a logical thinker and discoverer and systematiser of ideas”³⁸ that had been turned into a “collectivist mystique”, “a social cult enforced by the intolerant piety and enthusiasm of a converted people”.³⁹ In Fascist countries, the leaders and prophets teach and enforce their “totalitarian mystique” in the name of the national soul. Aurobindo finds little difference between Fascism and Russian Communism. Their quarrel is a sort of “a blood-feud of Kinsmen”. There is, he speaks of, “the seizure of the life of the community by a dominant individual, leader, Fuhrer, Dux, dictator, head of a small active minority, the Nazi, Fascist or Communist Party, and supported by a militarised partisan force”.⁴⁰

Aurobindo’s insight into the human cycles does not stop short of the totalitarian *mystique*. He looks further for an awaited “explosion from within”,⁴¹ against the total unprecedented compression of the whole communal existence executing the rational and intellectual expansion of the human mind. Reason cannot do its work, act or rule if the mind of man is denied freedom to think or freedom to realise its thought by action in life.

Man’s being is complex. Both the theories of individualism and totalitarianism have been at fault by ignoring the complexity. The right of the individual to egoistic freedom as against the State representing the mind, the will, the good and interest of the whole community is a dangerous fiction. It is dangerous, because it gives undue freedom to man’s infra-rational parts of nature. This needs to be kept under control by the collective reason and will of the State. The State, on its totalitarian turn, throttles whatever freedom of growth the individual rightfully needs and claims to have. The State, says Aurobindo, as the collective being, is a fact. All mankind, he says, may be regarded as a collective being. But this being is a soul and life, not merely a mind and body. In the earlier shapes of the human cycle the subjection of the individual to the

society was not felt, since the individualistic view of the life was not yet born. As State governments develop, there occurs a real suppression or oppression of the minority by the majority or of the majority by the minority, of the individual by the collectivity, finally, of all by the mechanism of the collectivity. Democratic liberty tried to minimize this suppression. It left a free play for the individual and restricted as much as might be the role of the State. Collectivism goes exactly to the opposite extreme. It will not give sufficient elbow-room to the individual free will. But man needs freedom of thought and life and action in order that he may grow, otherwise he will remain fixed where he was, a stunted and static being. If the free play of the intelligent will in life is inhibited by the excessive regulation of the life by the State, then an intolerable contradiction and falsity will be created. In course of time the intellectual and vital dissatisfaction may well take the form of anarchistic thought.

Aurobindo points to the disharmony between the *vyāsti* and *samasti* aspect of the Universal Being, the Reality as manifested in the human cycle. The defect of the socialistic idea of State is a thoroughgoing scientific regulation of life by a thoroughgoing mechanization of life. The tendency to mechanization is the inherent defect of the State idea and its practice. This is Aurobindo's considered view. It is indeed the inherent defect of reason when it turns to govern life and labour by quelling its natural tendencies to put into some kind of rational order. Intellectual anarchistic thought gets immensely increased as the State idea rounds itself into a greater completeness in practice.

Life, metaphysically viewed by Aurobindo, is a mobile, progressive and evolving force. This force is the increasing expression of an Infinite soul in creatures, and, as it progresses, becomes more and more aware of its own subtle variations, needs and diversities. Further, the progress of life involves the development and interlocking of things that seem to be absolute oppositions and contraries. The common project of humanity is to find some principle of unity or some workable lever of reconciliation. This becomes possible, given Aurobindo's evolutionary metaphysics, when the soul discovers itself in its complete spiritual

reality and effects a progressive upward transformation of its life values into those of the spirit. For Aurobindo, the spiritual is the one truth of which all others are veiled aspects, and in which they can find their own right form and true relation to each other. This is a work the reason cannot do. The business of the reason is intermediate. The office of the reason is to observe and understand this life by the intelligence and discover for it the direction in which it is going and the laws of its self-development on the way. The Reason is obliged to adopt temporarily fixed view-points, which are only partially true, to create systems that can hardly stand as the final expression of the integral truth of things. The integral truth of things is truth not of the reason but of the spirit. Since the reason mechanises and crystallises its systems every change in life becomes doubtful, difficult and perilous. Mechanism is a sufficient principle in dealing with physical forces, but it can never truly succeed in dealing with conscious life. The attempts at a rational ordering of life of infra-rational and semi-rational societies have been successful, but at the end of the curve of reason, when individualistic and collectivistic views of life have been brought about by the reason itself, it can no longer be either supreme or sufficient principle.

The question at this moment of crisis is whether anarchistic thought supervening upon the collectivistic can find a successful social principle. It may get rid of mechanism, but on what will it build and with what will it create the one practical means of a rationalizing organization of life?

Aurobindo contends that the collectivist period is at least a necessary stage in social progress. The vice of individualism was that it tended to exaggerate the egoism of the mental and vital being and prevented the recognition of unity with others. Collectivism at least insists upon that unity by subordinating the life of the isolated ego to the life of the greater group-ego, and stamping upon the mentality and life habits of the individual the necessity of unifying his life with the life of others. But when the individual would assert his most from within the collectivistic life, he will have learned to do it not on the basis of his separate egoistic life. This may have been the lesson of collectivism

as a corrective to individualism *simpliciter*. Collectivism too has to learn the lesson of allowing for a free individual development on the basis of unity and a closely harmonised common existence.

Aurobindo argues that in order that collectivism could do so it has to “spiritualise itself and transform the very soul of its inspiring principle: it cannot do it on the basis of the logical reason and a mechanically scientific ordering of life.”⁴²

Aurobindo’s understanding of ‘anarchism’ is different from its historical propounders. Tolstoy and Max Stirner, a contemporary of Karl Marx, are acclaimed as the forerunners of anarchism. The names of Godwin and Bakunin are also mentioned in the context. But among the real founders of anarchism we have Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Kropotkin. On the unanimous verdict of all authors on anarchism Proudhon was the first to coin the word. As early as 1840 he wrote: “Anarchy – the absence of a master, of a sovereign, - such is the form of government to which we are everyday approximating ...”⁴³ Proudhon equates anarchy with liberty or justice.

Aurobindo, of course, remarks that anarchism has not yet found any sure forms, and cannot but develop in proportion as the pressure of society on the individual increases. He says also that there is something in that pressure which unduly oppresses a necessary element of human perfection. Aurobindo distinguishes various shades of anarchism, namely, vitalistic or violent anarchism. These varieties of anarchism seek forcibly to react against the social principle, and claim the right of man to live his own life in the egoistic or crudely vitalistic sense. But there is Aurobindo points out, a higher, an intellectual anarchistic thought which recovers “the real truth of nature and the divine in man.”⁴⁴

“The intellectual anarchism”, as Aurobindo has it, “declares that all government of man by man by the power of compulsion is an evil, a violation, a suppression or deformation of a natural principle of good which otherwise grows and prevails for the perfection of the human race”.⁴⁵ This variety of anarchism

questions the social principle in itself and holds liable for a sort of fall in man from a natural to an unnatural and artificial principle of living. Aurobindo finds intellectual anarchistic view exaggerated and inherently weak. He remarks that man does not actually live as an isolated being, nor he can grow by an isolated freedom. He grows by his relations with others, and his freedom has to exercise itself in a progressive self-harmonising with the freedom of his fellow-beings. Society is a field of relations which affords to the individual his occasion for growing towards a greater perfection. Perfection, for Aurobindo, is a gradual ascent. But it is also true that man's infrarational instincts do not correct themselves voluntarily without the erection of a law for their correction and purification. The principle of social compulsion may not have been always or perhaps ever used quite wisely, yet "it is a law of man's imperfection, imperfect in itself, and must always be imperfect in its methods and result".⁴⁶ Only man has grown out of the causes of the necessity of social compulsion there can be no readiness on man's part for the anarchistic principle of living.

Aurobindo adds further to the above observation that "the more the outer law is replaced by an inner law, the nearer man will draw to his true and natural perfection. And the perfect State must be one in which government compulsion is abolished and man is able to live with fellow-man by free agreement and cooperation".⁴⁷

But the question of questions is: How and by what means man is to be made ready for the great and difficult consummation? Intellectual anarchism relies on two powers in the human being: (a) enlightenment of his reason and (b) the enlightened mind of man will claim freedom for itself as well as equally recognize the same right in others. A "just equation" of the two might not be enough, and a third power is needed, namely, (c) a natural human sympathy. Aurobindo observes that the principle of fraternity is the most neglected term of the famous revolutionary formula of the French Revolution. "A free equality founded upon spontaneous cooperation, not on governmental force and social compulsion, is the highest anarchistic ideal".⁴⁸ Aurobindo proposes to call the

described state of affair “Cooperative Communism” or “Communalism”(it is a pity that the term has lost its etymological meaning in which Aurobindo uses it). It is of course difficult to see how a stateless Communism can operate on the large and complex scale of the modern life. It is not clear also how even a free Communalism could be established or maintained without some kind of governmental force and social compulsion. Nor is it clear how it could fail or fall away in the end. Aurobindo makes further an important point that the logical mind in building its social idea takes no sufficient account of the infrarational element in man, the vital egoism to which the active and effective part of his nature is found. This part of man defects in the end all the calculations of the idealizing reason. If and when the ego-force in man is overshadowed or depressed, too much rationalized or denied an outlet, then the life of man becomes artificial, and uncreative. On the other side, if it is not suppressed, it tends in the end to assert itself, and derange the plans of the rational side of man. So the question remains: How can man live securely in his best human self as a perfected rational and sympathetic being, balanced and well-ordered in all parts? This would be his consummation, his summit of possibility. Aurobindo reminds us that man’s nature is transitional, the rational man is only a middle term of Nature’s evolution. A rational satisfaction, Aurobindo tells us, in terms of his metaphysical presuppositions, “cannot give him [man] safety from the pull from below nor deliver him from the attraction from above”.⁴⁹ If it were not so, then intellectual anarchism might be more feasible as well as a theory of what human life might be in its reasonable perfection.

A spiritual anarchism might appear to come nearer to the real solution, or at least, as Aurobindo suggests, touch something of it from afar. He does not let us forget the fact that no “ism” is able to express the truth of the spirit which exceeds all such compartments. The solution lies not in the reason, but in the soul of man.

Apropos Aurobindo's metaphysics, the spiritual is greater than the rational enlightenment, and it is a spiritual, an inner freedom that can alone create a perfect human order. The spiritual can illumine the self-seekings, antagonisms and discords. "A deeper brotherhood, a yet unfound law of love is the only sure foundation possible for a perfect social evolution."⁵⁰

The brotherhood is not possible for the natural heart of man, for it is baffled and deflected by opposite reasoning and discordant instincts. It is in the soul, then, the brotherhood must find its roots, the love is founded upon a deeper truth of our being. The brotherhood is a spiritual comradeship which is the expression of an inner realization of oneness.

Does not this futuristic account put off the consummation of a better human society to a far-off date? Aurobindo himself raises the question. His answer to it is based upon his analysis of the psychology at work behind the different social theories. He makes it abundantly perspicuous that no theory invented by reason (i.e., individualism, collectivism and intellectual anarchism – all products of the age of reason) can perfect either the individual or the collective man. This has been historically evident. Hence an inner change is needed in human nature. The change may be difficult, but nonetheless worth trying for. Spinoza in the last Scholium of his *Ethics* says that the way he had shown might seem very arduous, yet it can be discovered. "And indeed it must be arduous, since it is found so rarely. For how could it happen that, if salvation were ready at hand and could be found without great labour, it is neglected by almost all? But all excellent things are as difficult as they are rare."⁵¹ Aurobindo, too, speaks in the similar vein. The sceptic may disbelieve what he sets for the future, and says, "This is not certain; but in any case, if this is not the solution, then there is no solution, if this is not the way, then there is no way for the human kind."⁵² Aurobindo's point is that the terrestrial evolution must pass beyond man as it has passed beyond the animal, and a form of life nearer to the divine is to be formed in keeping with the logic of evolution of the involved

categories of the Reality. The spiritual anarchism remains a possibility given the premises of Aurobindo's philosophy.

Aurobindo, then, could be taken as thinking of the possibility of a society founded upon spirituality. The normal human society starts from the gregarious instinct modified by antagonism of interests, clash of egos. Society tries to accommodate converging interests and a treaty of peace between discords. The contracts in course of time become customs of the aggregate life, and develop into social law. In short, normal human society operates through its mechanism of law, custom and contract. Again, the normal society treats man essentially as a physical, vital and mental being. The life, the mind and the body are the three terms of man's normal social existence. What is significant is that Aurobindo holds the view that society tends to die by its own development. There is some radical defect in its system, which is a proof that its idea of man and its method do not correspond to all the reality of the human being and to the aim of life which that reality imposes. There is also a radical defect somewhere in the process of human civilization. Our civilized development of life ends in an exhaustion of vitality and a refusal of Nature to lend her support to man's advances. There has been a proliferation of needs, aided by more and more science, more and more mechanical devices and a more scientific organization of life. The engine is there almost to replace life, as though man can be saved by machinery. Aurobindo suggests that with some chance of knocking at the right door there could be a real self-finding and self-renewal. Only in the new turn inwards, towards a greater subjectivity the real truth of man might be found. "A large liberty will be the law of a spiritual society and the increase of freedom a sign of growth of human society towards the possibility of true spiritualization".⁵³ Aurobindo does not prescribe a post mortem salvation. The ascent of man into heaven is not the key, but rather his ascent here into the spirit and the descent also of the spirit into his normal humanity and transformation of this earthly nature.

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Chapter IV

Gandhi: Towards Stateless Society

Gandhi was, above all, a man of action. But it would be a mistake to underestimate the intellectual sinews of his thought, not only in the sphere of ethics and religion but also in the socio-economic and political fields. His thinking was fed by many streams from the East and the West, but what resulted was peculiarly his own. Gandhi's thought, as Romain Rolland said, was in constant evolution. Like other thinkers of the Indian Renaissance Gandhi was able to integrate the temporal and the spiritual. As he himself had made the point by saying that he was seeking God in politics.

What made Gandhi what he was? His South Africa days deserve close study in order to answer the question. He left South Africa as a seasoned politician with the tool for righting the disabilities of the underdog and with an intimation of his destiny as India's national leader. The habit of careful investigation of the facts and an attempt to settle disputes peacefully remained with Gandhi throughout his life. It was there that the method of non-violent resistance was born. One of the basic tenets of non-violence was that such a resistance should not take advantage of the difficulties of the 'enemy'. It might be conjectured if Gandhi would have approved Arjuna's attacking Karna when the latter's chariot-wheels had got stuck into the earth. Gandhi suspended the struggle for civil rights on the part of the Indians in South Africa, during the Boer War, from 1899-1902.

At home, in India, in 1916, Gandhi attended a session of the Indian National Congress at Lucknow. This was a momentous event in his life. At this session of the Congress, his help on behalf of the Indigo workers in Champaran was sought. This was how Gandhi's first *Satyagraha* campaign in India came about. In 1918, he was involved in a campaign of textile workers in Ahmedabad.

This was his first encounter with the Indian industrial working class.

Early in 1919 Gandhi was associated with explicit political activity for the first time. The Great War was over, but the British Government in India had failed to withdraw the Rowlatt Bills which curtailed civil liberties, and gave the executive arbitrary powers of arrest and imprisonment without trial. A new tool was fashioned by Gandhi to deal with this situation, that of the general *hartal* or strike. When a strike was called, the government panicked; unarmed people were fired on in Jallianwala Bagh on the Hindu New year's day and martial law was declared in Punjab. The subsequent history of Gandhi's life and career runs parallel to the history of the Indian National Struggle for independence.

Being a man of action, Gandhi's ideas were constantly on the move, and each new situation found him willing to experiment, to grow. To study his ideas it is never enough to read his writings, even though he was a prolific journalist and writer. One has to take account of what he did, including his personal habits, and his conduct of political, social, and economic affairs as well. One has to note that there is a singular lack of any doctrinaire element in Gandhi's thought. His ideas grew out of situations. Gandhi was a 'homespun' thinker as Margaret Chatterjee has commented¹. Clad in homespun cloth as he was, he thought and acted from the vantage point of what would benefit the toiling masses of India. The framework of his socio-economic thinking has them in view. To study Gandhi is to study the record of a pilgrim, someone who went on foot knowing the terrain well, not prescribing for others but improving as he went along, bearing in mind the goal of *Swaraj* for the poorest of the poor. In this sense Nandalal Bose's painting of Gandhi is remarkably true of the man.

I

Ideas for Gandhi grew out of situations and this is why the framework of his thought is not theoretical but what he had tested for himself and found to be practicable. Another way of stating this is to say that, for Gandhi, ideas must be put to work. There is, in fact, a strong pragmatic element in Gandhi's approach to men and things. A theoretical attachment to any particular idea was of value.

This is evident in Gandhi's thinking on the concepts of God, truth, and non-violence. In a real sense these concepts constitute the essence of his thought.

As for the concept of God, Gandhi belonged to a Vaisnava family of the *Vallabhācārya* tradition, that is to say he was a theist whose natural expression of religion was in the form of devotion rather than *gnosis* or enlightenment. His own favourite devotional reading was the *Gītā* and the *Īsopanisad*. He wrote a commentary on *Gītā* under the name of *Anāsaktiyoga*, and is followed by other distinguished members of Indian renaissance as Tilak and Sri Aurobindo, and even his latter day follower, Vinoba Bhave and Jaiprakash Narayan.

Jainism was strong in Gujarat, and Gandhi liked the Jaina idea of the many-sidedness of reality, *anekānta*. His use of vows and fasts as means of self-discipline clearly shows Jaina influence. He admired the *New Testament*, the Sermon on the Mount, in particular. He found much of the *New Testament* message echoed in his own experience. For example, he wrote: "Love never claims, it ever gives, love never suffers, never resents, never revenges itself".² He believed that "*Ahimsā* means 'love' in the Pauline sense" and he confessed that "though I cannot claim to be a Christian in the sectarian sense, the example of Jesus' suffering is a factor in the composition of my undying faith in non-violence which rules all my actions, worldly and temporal".³

Gandhi was a theist, and yet he often used Advaitin language in a very fresh sense and one foreign to the tradition of Advaita Vedānta. For instance, he once wrote to a correspondent: "God is in every one of us and, therefore, we have to identify ourselves with every human being without exception". In other words, he saw in other words, he saw at work in the world of persons a power which is the opposite of the power which is at work in the natural world – cohesion instead of fission. And God is there in the midst of them. This belief that all life is one, Gandhi said, requires a living faith in a living God who is the ultimate arbiter of our fate.⁴ But how are we to find God? He wrote: "The only way to find God is to see Him in His creation and be one with it. This can only be done by service of all. I am a part and parcel of the whole, and I cannot find

Him apart from the rest of humanity”.⁵ One should not mistake the Tagore ring in the line: *Visva sāthe yoge yethay vihāro/sei sāthe yog tomār sāthe āmāro*.⁶

Gandhi used the word ‘God’ interchangeably, most frequently with ‘Truth’. Gandhi, we may note, used the word ‘Truth’ in three senses: (a) Truth is what is *Sat*. In this sense Truth is equivalent to Being and God. This is the ontological sense of Truth. (b) Again, Truth is what conforms to the facts. One could call this the scientific connotation of truth, the ascertaining of which depends on a process of verification. Gandhi’s legal training had inclined him to investigate and ascertain the truth of the reports that reached him. (c) The third sense of truth is truth as authenticity, almost in the Kierkegaardian manner. In his autobiography there are passages highlighting his ‘experiments’ with truth in the authentic sense of the term, and it is public knowledge now.

Gandhi believed in the fractional approach to truth, that each man cannot possess more than a fraction of Truth. But each fragment is a valid fragment, and error consists in thinking that that is all there is; injustice consists in imposing our own view on others. Gandhi’s insistence on the fragmentariness of our vision provides him with a unique foundation for the concept of democracy. Unless we pool our wisdom collectively, our glimpses will be but partial. Even then, the whole will be hidden from us. Our understanding of Truth, in all the three senses referred to, grows.

Gandhi spoke of ‘Truth is God’ as a step further than ‘God is Truth’. But why? He made this famous statement, which almost looks like the immediate inference of conversion, without of course, running into a logical error. The statement ‘God is Truth’ is not an A proposition of the categorical sort. It is a definitional statement like ‘Truth is Beauty, Beauty is Truth’ which John Keats quoted, at the close of his famous Ode, from Shaftsbury. Apart from the logical propriety of the conversion, Gandhi was anxious to disarm the atheist. He was speaking to a gathering of conscientious objectors in Switzerland in December, 1931, which included both theists and atheists. And so he said, “I have come to the conclusion that the definition – Truth is God – gives me the greatest

satisfaction. And when you want to find Truth as God, the only inevitable means is Love, i.e., non-violence, and since I believe that ultimately the means and ends are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that ‘God is Love’”.⁷

In the ethical and even societal context Gandhi defined Truth as the Unity of all living beings, and whatever action violates the Unity is Untruth. Hence Truth as Unity entails non-violence.

Gandhi’s belief and thesis concerning the convertibility of ends and means and as continuous process differentiates him from the Marxists, who accept the possibility of a good end, such as a transformed and exploitation-free society, being brought about by violent means.

To see the concepts of God, Truth, and non-violence as closely linked as Gandhi did is to understand that the spiritual law does not work on a field of its own; rather it expresses itself only through the ordinary activities of life. It thus affects the economic, the social and the political fields. The matter is not simple, and raises the question to what extent belief in non-violence can survive minus the framework of belief in Truth and God. Gandhi’s own actions were, no doubt, inspired by his religious faith. But whether there can be a genuinely secular basis for belief in non-violence is a question that contemporary man may wish to raise. The principle of the fractional view of truth would certainly provide a sanction for non-violence. In Gandhi’s own life, however, there is no doubt that the ability to translate non-violent intentions into constructive words and deeds was nurtured in no small way by his life of devotion and by grace.

In Gandhi’s mind there was no discontinuity between means and ends, so was there no discontinuity between ethico-religious and socio-economic ideas. Religion was not something to be kept in a water-tight compartment, and hence, the removal of injustice was a religious duty.

II

Gandhi rarely set down his ideas in the form of a systematic essay or book. He has left behind a formidable body of literature, now collected in more

than ninety volumes. But even this mountain of writings does not contain a treatise on government and politics. The little book *Hind Swarāj*,⁸ therefore, is of special importance as a source book. He wrote it at a stretch on his way back to Durban after leading a deputation to England in 1909. *Hind Swarāj*, or *Indian Home Rule*, takes the form of a sort of Socratic dialogue with a patriotic young Indian who wished to justify the use of any kind of means in order to emancipate India from British Rule. To Gandhi, India's freedom could not be won by the use of wrong means.

Hind Swarāj contains in particular Gandhi's reflections on freedom, democracy and industrialization and his entire reaction to the concept of 'western civilization'. In this work, He speaks of a free India – free from imperialism. He speaks of *swarāj* to replace the rule of the sword. Political freedom is not merely freedom from foreign domination, it also signifies the end of our dependence on others for our livelihood. He will make a difference between *swarāj* and independence. He says: "Personally, I crave not for independence, which I do not understand ... I oppose independence as my goal. I want India to come to her own and the state cannot be defined by any single word other than 'swaraj' ..."⁹ There was a great deal in western civilization that Gandhi admired, but his own firsthand knowledge of the people of India convinced him that the Western socio-economic system was not only one, and that it would not be the right one for India. He asked his readers to remember that political freedom was not enough if social and economic freedom was not attained. It was not sufficient to exchange one government for another. It was necessary to think out what kind of society we wanted to have in India and start building here and now. The canker in all societies, whether Western or Indian, was exploitation leading to the concentration of power in the hands of a few, something which always perpetuated violence, and even led to warfare. Mere political democracy, therefore, did not ensure freedom for the masses or the people.

We propose to touch briefly his views of industrialization, which meant, for him, slave labour, the concentration of wealth in the hands of a few and the saving of labour instead of the generation of it. The last point was particularly important in the Indian context, where the crying need was for the provision of employment for the teeming millions. The only form in which God appeared to the poor was in the form of work, he had written. Vivekananda had said that God appeared to the poor in the form of bread.¹⁰ Gandhi agreed that there must be mass-production but in people's homes. In industrial society the towns prospered at the expense of villages. Instead of this the proper function of cities should be in the form of clearing houses for village products. Gandhi promoted hand-spinning with several ideas behind it, namely, it would provide a supplementary source of income between the harvests, it would be a symbol of self-sufficiency, and promote the ideal of simplicity. He favoured the idea of nationalization of the industries like Trotsky, but did not think that it could be an end in itself. He did not share the socialist belief that centralization of the necessities of life will conduce to the common welfare when the centralized industries are planned and owned by the State. Gandhi disliked industrialization because he believed that the people could take charge of their affairs, whether social, economic or political, only if the units were small. Big complexes lead to the concentration of powers in the hands of a few and to the risk of exploitation. The people, Gandhi had in mind, were the rural masses of India who maintained them through agriculture and not through industry. Industrialization in a few towns could not make much of a dent on rural poverty. But he was ready for new ideas in farming and intermediate technology which would increase productivity without displacing labour.

Gandhi gave great thought to how an egalitarian society could be brought about, and among his very practical suggestions was the concept of 'breed labour'. He shared Ruskin's insistence on the equal value of different kinds of work to society.

Another idea of Gandhi which contains revolutionary economic importance is the concept of trusteeship. Gandhi's thinking on economic matters began with the undisputed fact of the unequal distribution of wealth in India. How could this situation be remedied, given that the classes and the masses, stood side by side, and we could not start with a *tabula rasa* condition, and build a just society in the manner that we might wish? The problem is how the situation can be changed non-violently, given Gandhi's belief in non-violence. How can a situation in which the bulk of wealth of the community is concentrated in the hands of a few be altered?

At this point Gandhi's mind departs very considerably from that of the Marxists. He did not believe that a class war was inevitable. We have seen that in recent decades, and since Gandhi's time, how a capitalistic economy can transform itself in the direction of a welfare state. Gandhi had a fundamental faith in the goodness of human nature and believed that selfishness and acquisitiveness – factors that have no small place in the profit motive – can be overcome by other elements in the human makeup – the capacity for self-sacrifice, the ability to respond to the call for renunciation, a sense of sympathy with our fellow human beings. Gandhi wrote: "Socialism and communism of the West are based on certain conceptions which are fundamentally different from ours. One such conception is their belief in the essential selfishness of human nature...Our socialism or communism should, therefore, be based on non-violence and on harmonious co-operation of labour and capital, landlord and tenant."¹¹

Trusteeship, as a concept, fits into the framework of thought which Gandhi called *Sarvodaya*, i.e., the welfare of all. He found himself in substantial disagreement with the utilitarian belief in the greatest happiness of the greatest number. He disagreed on the ground that in a country with substantial minorities, to look only to the welfare of the majority would be an injustice.

These ideas of Gandhi on socio-economic matters were worked out by him in course of continuous experiments. And all these involved political activity, and it is with this that we shall start.

III

Gandhi's political thinking needs to be viewed taking into account his work in South Africa, his leadership of the Indian struggle for independence from British rule in general, and his relation to the Congress Party in particular. He was closely associated with Indian political life from 1915, when he returned to India from South Africa, until he was killed by a fanatic on 30 January, 1948. From about 1919 onwards he was the central figure in the movement for national independence, and even though he ceased to be a member of the Congress Party in 1934, he virtually remained its leader.

As a politician Gandhi was initially a believer in the use of constitutional means. But when constitutional means failed, he resorted to the 'soul-force' called *satyāgraha*. This had some resemblance to passive resistance or civil disobedience in that violence was to be eschewed. What Gandhi had in mind was more positive than Thoreau's famous essay on civil disobedience. Gandhi's idea of civil disobedience was linked to his own special understanding of Truth.

Why was Gandhi against violence? The answer is that Gandhi believed that one violent action leads to another. In this he believed in what the Buddha had said in the *Dhammapada*.¹² Violence concentrates power in the hands of a few, and always leads to suffering and degradation. War uses the method of coercion. *Satyāgraha* aims at conversion through self-suffering. Victory could be won by moral strength. It should be noted that *Satyāgraha* is not pacifism. Pacifism has reservations about the use of force, and holds that it could sometimes be used as a last resort if 'pacifism' did not 'work'. The pacifist does not have constructive programme. The latter had great importance for Gandhi. He thought people should have an experience of the new society that they were looking for and the discipline that working for it involved. This would give

people the training without which no *satyāgraha* campaign could be successfully concluded. Further, only the law-abiding have the right to offer *satyāgraha*. A random strike or agitation does not qualify as *satyāgraha*. The *satyāgrahī* must be mindful of his limitations. Leadership must be decentralized so that when the leaders are in jail, the campaign can go on. The leaders should not be separate from masses. Public opinion must be enlisted at every stage. The way for negotiation should be kept open. There should be no violence in speech or action. Every effort should be made to remain on good terms with the opponent. And lastly, if violence should break out then the campaign must be stopped. This is what happened in 1919 during the agitation after the Rowlett Act, and in 1922 in Chauri Chaura when the Congress workers had been involved in an act of violence. *Satyāgraha* as a political means is ethically grounded. There was, for Gandhi, a strong link between one's personal way of life and the ability to be a fit instrument of service to others. *Satyāgraha* as a method of conflict-resolution was definitely Gandhi's major contribution to political thought.

Gandhi's conception of democracy, like that of Rousseau's, was that special stress should be laid on intermediate institutions of a voluntary nature where the ordinary man would learn self-confidence in tackling his own problems.

The concept of *Swarāj* or self-rule contains Gandhi's ideas on the kind of political economy he envisaged for free India. He looked forward to a decentralized form of government with the village as the unit and functioning for the benefit of the individual. Indian independence, he said, must begin at the bottom. Every village has to be self-sustained and capable of managing its own affairs, even to the extent of defending itself against the whole world. This way of putting in his case is remarkable in many ways. Gandhi resembled the anarchists in his preference for political and economic decentralization, but wanted anarchism to be 'enlightened'.

Gandhi resembles the Marxists in his concern for an exploitation-free society where the interests of the masses (in the Indian context this meant the peasants) would be safeguarded. Gandhi had no doubt in his mind that the problem which faces man in our times is the threat of war, and he honestly believed that a village economy based on non-violence would be able to defend itself. Unless power is generated from below, a country as large as India would not be able to defend itself. He believed that for centuries in ancient times this was how India's rural economy had survived in spite of successive waves of exploitation.

Gandhi introduced the concept of 'oceanic circle' as a counter concept to the pyramidal structure of modern industrial state. This model of concentric circles, rippling outwards, with the individual at the centre is Gandhi's alternative not only to the pyramidal structure of the modern industrial state, but provides an alternative model to the stratified structure of society in India or elsewhere.

What Gandhi meant by *Swarāj*? The concept was introduced by Dadabhai Naoroji and Tilak. It meant "the government of India by the consent of the people as ascertained by the largest member of the adult population male or female, native-born or domiciled, who have contributed by manual labour to the service of the state and who have taken the trouble of having their names registered as voters". But he also said that *Swarāj* would involve a "continuous effort to be independent of government control whether it is foreign government or whether it is national".¹³ This shows the extent to which Gandhi refused to look on politics as the game of powers, be-all and end-all of contemporary life. It was his firm view that one should keep altogether aloof from power politics and its contagion. His ideas had come full circle. In the *Hind Swarāj* he had indicated that there was an alternative to the Western industrialized state with its reliance on political cum-military powers. A decentralized village-based economy would produce a civilization of a very different kind. Such a society, he said, is

necessarily highly cultured in which every man or woman know what he or she wants, and what is more, knows that no one should want anything that the others cannot have with equal labour.¹⁴ In an age of rising expectations Gandhi shifted the discussion from rights to duties. The minimum needs of all must be satisfied before the special needs of a few could be catered to. Expectations should be directed to ourselves, to what we could do to change reality rather than to what the government or those in authority would do for us.

IV

Gandhi was against all centrist phenomena in society. He proposed alternatives in almost all areas of human life and activity. Accordingly, he had a conception of state in keeping with his idea of the nature and structure of political institutions. Though Gandhi was an ardent supporter of the fundamental principles of democracy, e.g., freedom and equality, he was not in favour of any state, not even a democratic state. Like the anarchist he believed that the existence of the state is inseparably connected with violence. "The state represents violence in a concentrated and organized form. The individual has a soul, but as the state is a soulless machine, the state can never be weaned from violence to which it owes its very existence...What I disapprove of is an organization on force, which a state is".¹⁵ It is remarkable that both Sri Aurobindo and Gandhi used the same metaphor of machine for the state. The secret of their dislike of the Western conception of state is their idea of the individual as a *living will* or *soul* as they loved to put it. Further Gandhi says, "I look upon an increase of the power of the state with the greatest fear because although while apparently doing good by minimizing exploitation, it does the greatest harm to mankind by destroying individuality which lies at the root of all progress".¹⁶ Nowhere said Gandhi, the state lived for the poor, and never develops non-violence.

Gandhi's line of argument runs somewhat as follows: True democracy, based on the principle of justice, can never be born of violence. Justice is the

synthesis of freedom, equality, and non-violence. By force and power the state can never ensure either equality or liberty. If the means are tainted with violence physical or non-physical, the resulting state cannot be good for the individual. This method of non-violence or *ahimsā* differentiates Gandhi's anarchism from that of Proudhon or Bakunin, who reiterated the need for violent techniques to put an end to the violent state. The Gandhian method is mainly influenced by Tolstoy, Thoreau and Kropotkin, who in place of revolutionary method supported the evolutionary process of decentralization. True decentralization, Gandhi thinks, is an essential corollary of non-violence. Hence, for Gandhi, *ahimsā* comes before *Swarāj*.

We may now put Gandhi in the map of political thought. The Greeks believed that the State contributed in greater degree than any other social institution, to the realization of the finer and nobler capacities of man. Plato has argued extensively that education to be the true function of the State and that the State, in its ideal form makes the man. Socrates, in the *Crito*, even though a protagonist of individual reason, said that the State was like one's parent. In the West, we find two conceptions of State. One view is that the State is an organism, and the individuals are its parts. The State is real, and the individual is an abstraction. There is the other view that the State is a machine, a device, designed by men for their own purposes. This view was developed in the seventeenth century, and came to be challenged in the eighteenth. However, both these views still persist. Rousseau considers the State as a collective person, and embodiment of the General Will, but he, too, is inclined to view that the State as an association formed by men for their own purposes. But whether the State is looked upon as a machine, or as the General Will, obedience to State becomes imperative. Hegel regarded the State as omnipotent, infallible absolute, the perfected rationality and the crystallization of morality.

Till the end of the middle ages, the State had played only a limited role, there were several constraints on the operation of the dynamics of power.

Industrial revolution changed the face of the world. The system of Capitalism arose, and it led to the atomization of the society. The rural social structure, developed around the nucleus of agriculture, gave away under the grinding force of industrialization. The community was destroyed and the society was converted into an amorphous mass. The historical situation transformed the State qualitatively, and the modern State was born.

Now the State stands alienated from society. As Eric Fromm has remarked, man submits to the State as to the embodiment of his own social feelings which he worships as powers alienated from himself. In his private life as an individual he suffers from the isolation and aloneness which are the necessary result of this separation. The worship of the State can only disappear if man takes back the social powers into himself builds a community in which his private and social existence are one and the same. Gandhi thought along the way Fromm has been formulating. The State weakens and displaces all other social associations, and industrial growth not only acted as a catalyst for the rise of the modern State, putting immense power at its hands, and thereby gave rise to imperialism and colonialism. Gandhi had a clear understanding of the role of capitalism in the emergence of the modern State. It is Capitalism, he saw, which makes State intervention necessary in economic affairs. He said, Capitalism contributed to the emergence of all-powerful State which makes individual freedom impossible.

Marxism projects the idea of the withering away of the State. The Marxian view regarding the State may be had from Engel's classic work *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*. In Engel's words, "The State is a product of society at a certain stage of development, it is the admission that this society has become entangled in an insoluble contradiction with itself, that it has split into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to dispel. But in order that these antagonisms, these classes with conflicting economic interests might not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, it

became necessary to have a power, seemingly standing above society, that would alleviate the conflict and keep it within bounds of order; and this power arising out of society but placing itself above it, and alienating itself more and more from it, is the State".¹⁷ This account rejects Engel's idea of the State as the image and reality of reason. The point is that the State has existed from all eternity, and that there have been societies that did without it, that had no idea of the State and state power. On the Marxian premises, it is hoped that if and when production is reorganized on the basis of a free and equal association of the producers, the whole machinery of the state will become obsolete.

According to Marxist conception a State is essentially a 'class State'. A State is ultimately governed by those elements and interests in society that are economically the most powerful. Those who control the economic power ultimately decide the character of the State, whatever be the outward form. The Marxist believes in the withering away of the State, not its abolition. The seizure of the means of production would be the last act in founding the proletarian State, as a State.

Tolstoy's doctrine goes by the name of Christian anarchism. To him, the State, private property and organized churches were incompatible with Christianity. For him the State and the class hierarchy are evil, the disciple of Jesus be a rebel, a conscientious objector. But Tolstoy did speculate on the future organizations of society. He advocated non-violence, bread labour, simplicity and passive resistance to all evils.

For Gandhi since state is deeply rooted in violence and perpetuates exploitation, so he stands for its abolition. It has no place in a non-violent society. He condemns the State not so much that it is an agency of domination but more due to the fact that it hinders the ethical development of man. It corrupts the man, demoralizes him and leaves him into a state of abject surrender. The State contradicts the nature of man. We should bear in mind that Gandhi defined man in certain moral and spiritual terms. Man, for Gandhi, is a

master of himself, of his thoughts, intentions, deeds and passions. He is answerable to none but to himself. When society is composed of such individuals, there would be no place for the mechanism of the State. The State thus retards the growth of individual's personality, and is destructive of his freedom. So Gandhi views every increase of the powers of the State with fear.

By political power Gandhi means "The power to control national life through national representatives". In his opinion political power should not be a negation of individual's freedom and autonomy. National representatives, according to him, "... will become unnecessary if the national life becomes so perfect as to be self-controlled. It will then be a state of enlightened anarchy in which each person will become his own ruler... In an ideal state there will be no political institution and therefore no political power".¹

Gandhi's objection to the existence of the State is based on three grounds: (a) that it is an embodiment of violence; (b) that it is soulless; and (c) that it destroys individuality and retards man's progress.

It has often argued that Gandhi's views as regards the State are both a form of anarchism and of utopianism, at least in its present form. Gandhi, like Marx, thought that the existence of the State is due to incompatibility of different group interests. Class interest, of course, was not his idiom. But the imports of the idioms are kindred. Gandhi appreciated Thoreau's adage that that government is best which governs the least. In other words, the minimal state which governs the least needs self-governing people as its citizens. He disproves of any organization based on force that the State is. The force which Gandhi abhorred is replaceable only by voluntary organizations. And the Gandhian sort of voluntary organization presupposes successful self-governing citizens. The ideal of self-governing people is antithetical to the Gandhian concept of the State which reminds one of the Marxist concept of the State. Gandhi said that the State represents violence in concentrated and organized form. The Marxist speaks of violence in terms of class conflict and exploitation, patent or latent, and Gandhi

also does the same. Both Marx and Gandhi wanted to dismantle the State machinery because it was soulless (as Gandhi said) or dehumanizing (as Marx put it). But since the machinery has a strong foundation in the form of class or group conflict, it is not easy to do so. While Marx thought that it could not be dismantled except through armed revolution, according to Gandhi, revolution involves violence and hatred, and he was convinced that whatever is gained through violence has to be retained by reinforced violence. This is known as the paradox of violence. Marx had given the constraints of situations, no perception of a non-violent way out of the paradox. But Marx was perceptive enough to say that violence-based dictatorship was transitory, purely temporary, and the socialist state should be based on authentic consciousness of the proletariat. This diluted role of violence, of course, would not be acceptable to Gandhi. No institutional mechanism can ever succeed in putting violence in check. Gandhi, therefore, relied more on native love in man, i.e., the non-violent nature of individual human beings.

Both Marx and Gandhi were committed, though in different ways, to the utopias of anarchism. But neither would agree that the ideal state of society they envisaged was really utopian. When Marx spoke of the stateless communist society of the future, he did believe that it was a historical necessity and did not therefore depend on the ethical goodness of this individual or that, of this class or that. Somewhat similarly, when Gandhi speaks of *Rāma Rājya*, a social order free from political bindings and consisting of self-governing individuals, he was really convinced that this is a destiny which mankind in its quest for perfection has been aiming at all the time. Historicists of the empiricist persuasion, do appreciate the Gandhian or the Marxist utopia, yet point to the existing state of political and economic affairs as involving unimplementability of the ideologies. This unimplementability is ascribed to its anti-empirical and anti-historical character. Both Gandhi and Marx might try to meet the objection by highlighting their respective views of human nature. Marx used to say that man is a self-

exceeding animal, and that he exceeds himself by his labour, which makes him a part of a definite class, and from which he continues to draw sustenance for further self-exceeding labour. Similarly, Gandhi affirmed in a Vedantic vein that human nature is like a spark of fire, a part of a boundless whole to which man always feels inwardly or spiritually drawn. This spiritual affiliation of the individual man to the total reality makes him a self-transcending creature. His love for others and all creatures is expressive of his transcendental origin and orientation.

To understand the basic difference between Marx's utopia and Gandhi's, one has to group their views regarding the ultimate reality and its relation with human nature. For Gandhi, reality is consciousness, or God, properly so-called. The relation obtaining between God and man is like that between the sun and its rays. As an Advaitin, Gandhi believes in the essential unity of men. According to him, man is essentially divine, whatever is undivine in him is alien to him, imposed upon him from without. This approach to human nature is based on the primacy of freedom, said to be native to human nature itself. Given this view, the role of institution in human life becomes secondary. In this respect Gandhi's difference from Marx is marked.

By 'freedom' Marx meant recognition of necessity, historical and economic. Gandhi defined it in terms of self-realisation, which is a sort of God-realisation. Gandhi attached primary importance to individual *Swarāj* or self-rule. One could be free or truly self-ruled whatever might be one's socio-economic, i.e., external-institutional conditions. This unconditional nature of freedom is unacceptable to Marx. For him, freedom is socially situated, and the ideal social order can only be a gift of history, to be achieved by the exploited in and through struggle against the exploiter. Gandhi did not rule out the necessity of struggle for freedom. His main emphasis was on internal freedom. Unless one could first be internally free and fearless *satyāgrahī*, one could not effectively fight for a great cause. Institutional support or class-affiliation is never enough

for Gandhi to ensure success. This difference between Marx and Gandhi needs to be appreciated.

Gandhi's notion of *sarvodaya* and *Swāraj* have often accused of being historically frozen, admitting of no possible change thereafter. In points of fact all utopians are so criticized. A word on this issue will be in order.

All utopias are not alike. An utopia such as Plato's *Republic* or Kant's *Kingdom of Ends* are intrinsically different from Gandhi's *Swāraj* and Marx's vision of the communist society. As for Gandhi, once the means-value is said to be negotiable or can be compromised on this or that 'practical' ground, a sort of moral skepticism, a departure from high political idealism, becomes almost incapable. This is the basic point of his paradox of violence. The importance of means to Gandhi is as great as that of end itself. He is not prepared to compromise it even for the highest cause of freedom, personal or national. On Marx's premises, for the sake of social transformation in revolutionary situations, the relation between ends and means is not immutable but flexible. What is taken to be just in an ordinary situation need not be so in a revolutionary one. There is such a thing as revolutionary justice. To this Gandhi would never agree.

The anti-utopian argument often takes the following form. If the utopia is perfect, it should not be changed; if it is not perfect, it is not a utopia in the highest or idealistic sense. Either it is perfect, or it is not. Therefore, either it should not be changed, or it is not yet to be achieved or established. Given this argument one has to believe that Gandhi's utopia to *Rāma Rājya* will know no change. There will be left no scope for conflict or violence, necessitating any institution to deal with it, and providing any impetus for further historical change. Such has been the argument offered by Dahrendorf against all utopians, be it Plato's *Republic* or Marx's Communist Society.¹⁷ Dahrendorf does not take into account the reason why utopias are offered at all. The answer to the question may be found in man's perpetual dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs

and his efforts to change them and build a better social order. Popper too (in his *Open Society and its Enemies*) has argued against utopias or products of utopic imagination, and Dahrendorf quotes him approvingly. Both of them are opposed to historical transcendence. But whether a particular mode of creative imagination such as that of Aurobindo's or of Gandhi cannot be decided *apriori*. Too much insistence on remaining close to experience results in a sort of positivism, both epistemological and sociological. Moreover, all utopias are products of their time. And, in the present case, Gandhi was not necessarily a self-deluding person or unfamiliar with the history of his time. But at the same time, he was aware of the discrepancy between what he saw around him and what he wanted to see beyond him. Transcendence is the essence of both ideology and utopia, in Gandhi's *Rāma Rājya* or Aurobindo's spiritual anarchy, in Marx's communist society, and Kant's Kingdom of Ends. From his metaphysical standpoint Gandhi can defend his utopia. According to his view of human nature, even in *Rāma Rājya* there will be unevenness between man and man, as all people cannot simultaneously reach the highest level of self-realisation. Even if the difference between personal life, aggressive social life, and the best possible life is narrowed down to the minimum, there will still be justification left for the existence of distinct individuals and the necessity for their continuous and creative cooperation. Given this element of imperfection, *Rāma Rājya*, if ever established, will never be static. Unequal beings would continue to derive inspiration from one another to grow steadily. Dahrendorf's argument against the frozen character of utopias may be more meaningfully directed against Plato and Kant rather than Gandhi.

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Chapter V

Subhas Chandra Bose: The Pilgrim in Politics

In the pre-independence political scenario of India Subhas Chandra Bose appears to have emerged from a high drama of personal heroism and bravery without even a trace of fear and cowardice. One could justifiably feel applying the word *charisma*, in the Greek sense of the term to Bose's person and role. Giving up, voluntarily, the coveted saddle of Civil Service in British India, he threw himself, heart and soul, into the rough waters of anti-British politics. He played the role of *enfant terrible* in the Indian National Congress by challenging the rightist policies of the political respectability, including Gandhi. His resolutions as the President of the Congress were inclined towards socialism and the left. He was an uncompromising strategist, believing it right to strike the irons when it was red. He vowed for complete national independence and disdained any compromise in the anti-imperialist struggle for attaining it. His disagreements with the Congress High Command led to his alienation from the Congress ideology, and Bose floated his own party, calling it the Forward Block for establishing "a thoroughly modern Socialist State"¹ The height of the drama of Bose's life was reached when he escaped from his internment in Calcutta under the vigilant eyes of the British police and spies. He traveled incognito through the entire expanse of northern India, and went out to Kabul, and from there to Germany, and finally emerged as the Supreme Commander of the Indian National Army at Singapore. The escapade left his people with wide-eyed wonder, and it vied, in daring and courage, with Shivaji's getting away from Aurangzeb's prison in Delhi. The rest is history, and Bose came to be enthroned in the hearts of his countrymen as the leader of leaders, and earned for himself the appellation "Netaji", by which he is unmistakably known and referred to. Epic analogies are available for Bose's dramatic career; he stood to Gandhi as Arjuna did to Bhishma, reverent to and yet rebelling against. If Gandhi

represented the political wisdom of India, patient and ever watchful of the ancient values, Bose, much in the likeness of Vivekananda, symbolized her youth. From across the decades, it is still possible to hear Bose's call: "Forward, therefore, and ever forward, my countrymen"²

I

Bose wrote two autobiographies. In one of these he described himself as "an Indian pilgrim". Another called *The Indian Struggle* deserves to be put on the same shelf with Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, though narrated with a candour in a language shorn in poetry, yet not lacking in fire and passion. The account of Subhas Chandra Bose's ideas of State and anti-imperialist politics are given in terms of his two autobiographies, namely, *An Indian Pilgrim*, and *The Indian Struggle*. These are the two basic sources works for his ideas and actions. One can follow the pilgrim's progress through the pages of his autobiographies. There are albeit other studies of Bose's life and actions, some of which are valuable in themselves. But ours have been the intention of studying Bose in terms of his own account. He was capable of remarkable objectivity about himself. Mention may be made of the account of his great escapade narrated in the third person. This deserves to be quoted: "After considering the different means whereby this (i.e., Indian freedom fighters should have first hand information as to what was happening abroad and should join the fight against Britain and thereby contribute to the break up of the British Empire), could be done he found no other alternative but to travel abroad himself. Towards the end of January, 41, he quietly left his home one night at a late hour. Though he was closely watched by the secret police he managed to dodge them and after an adventurous journey, managed to cross the Indian frontier. It was the biggest political sensation that had happened in India after a long time". This is narrated on page 346 of *The Indian Struggle*. This sense of impersonality could have been a remnant of Bose's study of Vedanta since his childhood. There was a mystic side which did not shed completely. It is possible, with the help of these autobiographies, to relate Bose's ideas of state that he envisaged for India. And

that is what we shall endeavour to work out in the present context. But before we could carry out the project we should gather the images of the man as they come out from the pages of the autobiographies.

Bose's description of himself as an Indian pilgrim is quite significant. The spiritual ring about the phrase tells a lot. Bose grew up as an introvert, perplexed by doubts and anxieties. His description of his adolescent psychological life is candid and honest in detailing his acute mental conflict. Bose chanced upon the works of Swami Vivekananda, and the message that emanated from the books, moved him profoundly. "I was thrilled to the marrow of my bones", Bose records.³ Thus Vivekananda enters Bose's life, and kindled the fire of patriotism in him, and his motherland became the queen of his adoration. It was, he said, "a revolution within and everything was turned upside down"⁴

It was through Vivekananda that Bose's imagination was fired by the life and teachings of Ramkrishna. Monasticism held a spell for him, and he took to religion and yoga seriously, and even left his home visiting the holy places of the Hindus. But the intensity of the religious impulse died down gradually yielding to the idea that spiritual development required social service. One lasting influence of Vivekananda's teaching on Bose was the ideal of the service of Humanity which included the service of one's country. Again, under the influence of Vivekananda, Bose came to believe that revolt was necessary for self-fulfilment. As he entered the college he had by then definite ideas and principles, and made certain definite decisions for himself: that he would not follow the beaten track and was going to lead a life conducive to his spiritual welfare and the uplift of humanity. To quote Bose from his autobiography: "I was going to make a profound study of philosophy so that I could solve the fundamental problems of life; in practical life I was going to emulate Ramkrishna and Vivekananda as far as possible and, in any case, I was not going in for a worldly career".⁵ Bose had taken months and years of groping to arrive at the decisions.

Bose entertained doubts as regards the social and moral values, and longed for a revaluation of existing ones (social and moral values). His doubts were more existential than the Cartesian. For Bose skeptical doubting was “a stepping stone towards the reconstruction of reality”⁶, and he noted that in this respect each individual is a law unto himself (or herself). Bose goes on to remark that no great achievement is possible without a revolution in one’s life, and that the revolution has two stages, one, the stage of doubt or skepticism, and another, the stage of reconstruction. Progress in life, as Bose relates, means a series of doubts followed by a series of attempts at resolving them.

In his undergraduate days he came to imbibe the ideas of Sri Aurobindo through the periodical called *Arya*, which the latter edited. Bose was impressed by Aurobindo’s philosophy. The doctrine of *māyā* was “like a thorn in my flesh”⁷, Bose remarks. He could not accommodate his life to the doctrine, in spite of Vivekananda’s teachings, nor could he get rid of it. The needed philosophy came from Aurobindo. Aurobindo’s conception, as a synthesis of *yogas*, *jñāna*, *karma* and *bhakti* appealed to Bose as “something original and unique”⁸. Bose has related with a feeling of pity the sight of an old decrepit bagger woman bagging for alms in front of his house in Calcutta. “Her sorrowful countenance and her tattered clothes pained me whenever I looked at her or even thought of her ... What was the value of yoga if so much misery was to continue in the world? Thoughts like these made me rebel against the existing social system”⁹. Bose resolved to save his pocket money and spent in charity.

Bose points out that his political consciousness was aroused by the outbreak of the First World War. It came as a shock and made him reevaluate or re-examine his ideas and accepted values. There had set in a partial disillusionment about *Yoga* and asceticism. He asked himself: “Was it possible to divide a nation’s life into two compartments and hand over one of them to the foreigner, reserving the other to ourselves”? He concluded that “If India was to be a modern civilized nation, she would have to pay the price and she would not by any means shirk the physical, the military problem. Those who worked for

the country's emancipation would have to be prepared to take charge of both the civil and military administration. Political freedom was indivisible and meant complete independence of foreign control and tutelage. The war had shown that a nation that did not possess military strength could not hope to preserve its independence."¹⁰

Bose recounts that from his philosophy he acquired intellectual discipline and a critical frame of mind. It emancipated his mind from preconceived notions, and he was led to question the truth of Vedānta, on which he had taken his stand so long. The incident that led to his expulsion from the college is well-known and need not be recapitulated. What is of moment is Bose's remark that the event made his future career, gave him a foretaste of leadership that entailed renunciation, self-confidence, initiative, and, above all, martyrdom. The expulsion was a sort of awakening of reality. This is implied by the remark: "Shankaracharya's Maya lay dead as a door nail".¹¹

Bose resumed his graduate studies in philosophy after having lost two years in having been expelled. But in the meantime, he enrolled himself in India's Defence Force. He found pleasure in soldiering. His feeling of strength and self-confidence grew further. That was a different feeling of life altogether: "What a change it was from sitting at the feet of anchorites to obtain knowledge about God, to standing with a rifle on my shoulder ...".¹²

In Cambridge, Bose studied metaphysics with McTaggart. This left an abiding influence on Bose, and it is evident from Bose's account of his philosophical faith in the autobiography called *An Indian Pilgrim*. We shall come to it later. Bose's study of European history from original sources was an eye-opener. That Europe was not a magnified edition of Great Britain dawned upon Bose. He realized that Europe had a distinct cultural and political identity of her own. This realization had paid dividends during Bose's turbulent years in Berlin and other parts of Europe. The "original sources, more than anything else, I studied at Cambridge, helped to rouse my political sense and to foster my understanding of the inner currents of international politics".¹³

Bose came out in the Civil Service Examination, and in consonance with his earlier resolve not to follow the beaten track, he, after an arduous mental struggle of seven months, decided to resign. Bose mentions in a footnote that Lokamanya B.G. Tilak, in course of a visit to Cambridge, had admonished the Indian students not to go for Government service but to devote themselves to national service. Bose had two paradigms to choose between. One, the Ramesh Chandra Dutt paradigm of entering the Civil Service, and the other the Aurobindo Ghose's paradigm of giving up the idea of entering it at all. The latter paradigm was to Bose "more noble, more inspiring, more lofty, more unselfish, though more thorny than the path of Ramesh Dutt".¹⁴ Bose wrote to the members of his family of his conviction: "Only on the soil of sacrifice and suffering can we raise our national edifice".¹⁵ Bose thought that if the members of the services withdrew their allegiance, then the bureaucratic machinery would collapse. The allegiance of a foreign bureaucracy was repugnant to him. He argued that every Government servant whether he be a petty *chaprasi* or a provincial Governor only helps to contribute to the stability of the British Government in India. "The best way to end a Government is to withdraw from it".¹⁶

Bose's autobiography ends with a statement of his philosophical faith. At one time Bose was an absolutist and thought that the doctrine of *māyā* was the quintessence of knowledge. The doctrine intrigued him for long, but ultimately he found that he could not live it, and discarded it on pragmatic considerations. The idea that the Absolute was incomprehensible under human conditions, and that Kant's forms of understanding filter the Absolute for us appealed to Bose. As for the idea that the Absolute could be comprehended through yogic perception, he inclined towards "benevolent agnosticism".¹⁷ He took up the position of a relativist. On the one hand, he would not repudiate the claims on behalf of supra-mental awareness of the Absolute as sheer moonshine, since so many individuals claim to have experienced that in the past, and, on the other, he holds on to the view that truth as known to us is not absolute but relative. "It is relative to our common mental constitution, to our distinctive characteristics as

individuals, and to changes in the same individual during the process of time”.¹⁸ In short, our notions of the Absolute are relative to our human mind, and if such notions differ, they may all be equally true; the divergence may be accounted for by the distinctive individuality of the subject.

Having discarded absolutism, Bose says that the world is real in a relative sense, and then life should become interesting and acquire meaning and purpose. For Bose, the relative reality is dynamic, it moves towards a better state of existence. To say that reality is dynamic is not to imply a meaningless notion. Further, reality is spirit, that it, it works with a conscious purpose through time and space. That reality is spirit is a pragmatic necessity. “My nature demands it. I see purpose and design in nature: I discern an ‘increasing purpose’ in my own life”.¹⁹ The spiritual nature of reality, for Bose, is “an intellectual and moral necessity, a necessity of my very life”.²⁰

The world is a manifestation of Spirit. Our experience is bipolar: there is the self, the mind which receives, and the non-self, the source of all impressions, which form the stuff of our experience. The non-self, apart from the self is also real, and can hardly be ignored. Our knowledge of reality can at best be relative, most of our conceptions of reality are true, though partially. But the conception that represents the maximum truth for Bose may be stated in his own words: “For me, the essential nature of reality is LOVE. LOVE is the essence of the universe and is the essential principle in human life ... I see all around me the play of love; I perceive within me the same instinct; I feel that I must love in order to fulfill myself and I need love as the basic principle on which to reconstruct life”²¹. Bose confesses that his epistemology is unorthodox, and has reached the conclusion partly from a rational study of life in all respects, partly from intuition and partly from pragmatic considerations. Bose has an argument in support of his thesis that the essential principle in human life is love. There is much in life that is opposed to love. The paradox is explained by saying that “the ‘essential principle’ is not yet fully manifest, it is unfolding itself in space and time. Love, like reality of which it is the essence, is dynamic”.²²

The nature of the process of unfolding of love is progressive in character. Bose says that progress may not be unilinear, there may be periodic setbacks, but on the whole, there is progress. There is also the intuitive experience that we are moving ahead. And it is both biological and moral to have faith in progress. As for the law of progress Bose takes into account the Sāmkhya, Spencer's view that evolution consists in a development from the simple to the complex, Hartman's idea that the world is a manifestation of blind will, and therefore, it would be futile to look for an underlying idea; Bergson's thesis that evolution is creative, and hence it implies a new departure at every stage, and cannot be predicted in advance by the human intellect, and lastly, Hegel's dogma that the evolutionary process is dialectical. Apropos of his relativism, Bose does not reject any of the views, all of them have an element of truth, and each of the thinkers had sought to reveal the truth as he has perceived it. But Bose is inclined to take Hegel's theory as the nearest approximation to truth, as it explains the facts more satisfactorily. Yet he opined that even Hegel's theory cannot be regarded as the whole truth, since all the facts as we know them, do not accord with it. "Reality is, after all, too big for our frail understanding to fully comprehend"..²³ Nevertheless, he said, we have to build our life on the theory which contains the maximum truth. "We cannot sit still because we cannot or do not know the Absolute Truth" is another characteristic remark of Bose.

Before we pass on to considering Bose's political ideas, we may remark that Bose's position has much likeness to the Buddhist view of steering clear of both eternalism or *Śāśvatavada*, and nihilism or *ucchedavada*. The strong pragmatic accent has a Buddhist ring about it as much as his rejection of Absolutism of the Vedantic variety. Relativism and pragmatism are considerations of a strategist that Bose was in life and action. There is another remarkable feature of Bose's thought, namely his characterization of Reality as Love. Apart from Vaisnavism the metaphysical views of McTaggart could have been a formative factor.

II

We have noticed, while pursuing Bose's autobiography, the element of the rebel in his physical life. He was an inspired rebel. "My life is a mission – a duty", he wrote in a letter dated 20.11.15²⁴, and he hated the philosophy of expediency. One would do well to compare Bose's impatient passion for freedom, his view that reality is Spirit, the essence of which is love with what Albert Camus says in *The Rebel*. Camus defines a rebel as a man who says "no". There is much in Bose to endorse the view, for both Bose and Camus' rebellion is one of man's essential dimensions. It is our historical reality. Bose would have said as much as Camus does: "I rebel, therefore, we exist".²⁵ Camus says that rebellion cannot exist without a strange form of love, to give everything for the sake of life and of living men. It is noble generosity towards the future in giving all to the present. The rebel is a strange lover. All this is no less true of Bose.

III

The Indian Struggle is another autobiographical account of Bose. But it is an autobiography with a difference. It tells the story of India's struggle for independence from 1920 to 1942, giving Bose's own assessment of the process of wresting freedom from the British. The *leitmotif* of Bose's resigning the Civil Service was to dissociate himself from the British colonial administration in India in every possible way. On his return from Cambridge he met Gandhi in Bombay, but realized that Gandhi was not going to be his mentor in politics. It was C.R. Das who caught his imagination, and any reader of the *Indian Struggle* would hardly failed to notice Bose's admiration and enthusiasm for Das; "I feel I had found a leader and I meant to follow him". Bose wrote about Das after his meeting with him.²⁶ Bose's political ideology and sense of strategy can be better appreciated if it were studied in juxtaposition with Gandhi's. *The Indian Struggle* is both an exposition and a critique of Gandhi's political maneuverings of the situations and interfacing with the British colonial power. Speaking n

terms of Freudian psychology one could say that Bose bore a love-hate relationship with Gandhi, whom Bose described as “India’s man of destiny”.²⁷

There is something temperamental about Bose’s descriptions of the periods and turns of India’s struggle for independence. His metaphors are drawn from nature’s disquiet moods and moments. Bose has called his king in terms of Indian psychology one could say that Bose bore a love-hate relationship with Gandhi, whom Bose described as “India’s man of destiny chapters by such names as “The Clouds Gather”, “The Storm Breaks”, “Sign of Coming Upheaval”, “Story 1930”, and “The Barometer Rises”. One could read Bose’s intention of naturalization of the Indian struggle, and the consequences of the revolt. This may have reflected Bose’s passionate impatience with the colonial rule. We may note, in this context Bose’s characteristic remark that “There is no royal road to success in winning political freedom”.²⁸ One is left to surmise if Gandhi could have said this. Gandhi was hardly ever impatient and convinced of his method of *satyāgraha* founded on *ahimsā*, non-cooperation and passive resistance. He would not travel any other path. Bose preferred to change his tactics as and when the situation demanded, Gandhi did not lack a spirit of defiance, but Bose considered Gandhi’s measures as ineffective to “menace the very existence to the Government”.²⁹

While in the Congress Bose devoted his time, thought and energy to consolidating the leftist elements within. Bose represented the “heterodox thought” and “dynamic and radical elements”,³⁰ within Congress. He put the Right-Left encounter in terms of Hegelian dialectics. “Philosophically speaking, Right-consolidation is the ‘thesis’ which demands its ‘anti-thesis’ in Left-consolidation”. Without this ‘anti-thesis’ and the conflict following in its wake, no further progress is possible”.³¹ In order to bringing about left-consolidation, he founded the Forward Block in 1939, and resigned the office of the President of Congress.

But what did Bose mean by Leftism? He has clarified the issue in the following manner: “Leftism means anti-imperialism. A genuine anti-imperialist is one who believes in undiluted independence (not Mahatma Gandhi’s substance of independence) as the political objective and in uncompromising national struggle as the means for attaining it. After the attainment of political independence, Leftism will mean Socialism and the task before the people will then be the reconstruction of national life on a socialist basis”.³² Bose looked upon the Rightists as milk and water nationalists.³³ Leftism has had the foes to fight against, one, “foreign imperialism and its Indian allies,” and the other, the Rightists. Leftism, therefore, stands in the chance of being presented both within and without.

Did Bose consider Gandhi a Rightist? No exactly so, But he did think that the Rightists more often than not rallied around the father-figure, had often his blessings. Gandhi represented another face of anti-imperialism, though less radical. “Gandhism,” Bose writes, “envisages an ultimate compromise with imperialism for Gandhism Satyagraha (or Civil Disobedience) must end in a Compromise”.³⁴ Bose was prepared to take any truck with imperialism. Again, “Socially, Gandhism is intimately linked up with the ‘haves’ – the vested interests”.³⁵ Bose thought that the have-nots on becoming class-conscious, would discard Gandhism. He even made a forecast that Gandhism will lose every appeal to large masses of the pesantry and factory workers, middle class youths and students. Bose considered Gandhian ideas of post-struggle reconstruction as partly medieval and partly anti-socialist. The question whether Bose’s judgments are idiosyncratic or historically validated is one which we do not propose to enter into. We are, on the contrary, interested in juxtaposing the two major ideologies that had enlivened the Indian struggle, and appreciate their unique differences.

It should not, of course, be thought that Bose had undermined or rejected Gandhi’s strategies lock stock and barrel. He had admiration and respect enough for Gandhi. He always used the term “Mahatma” for Gandhi. We may note in

passing some of the appreciations that Bose had made of Gandhi and his revolutionary role at hours of national crisis:

- (a) "... the clouds began to gather and towards the end of 1920 the sky was dark and threatening. With the new year came whirlwind and storm. And the man who was destined to ride the whirlwind and direct the storm was Mahatma Gandhi".³⁶
- (b) Bose read the symbolism of Gandhi's appearance and apparel. "His (Gandhi's) loin-cloth was reminiscent of Christ, while his sitting posture at the time of lecturing was reminiscent of Buddha ... all this was a tremendous asset to the Mahatma compelling the attention and obedience of his countrymen".³⁷
- (c) Speaking of Gandhi's role in Indian history Bose wrote: "... there sprang up India's man of destiny – Mahatma Gandhi ... He knew himself, he knew his country's needs and he knew also that during the next phase of India's struggle, the crown of leadership would be on his head".³⁸
- (d) Of Gandhi's march to Dandi in disobedience of the Salt Law, Bose remarks: "The march to Dandi was an event of historical importance which will rank on the same level with Napoleon's march to Paris on his return from Elba or Mussolini's march to Rome when he wanted to seize political power."³⁹

Notwithstanding the appreciation, there is an underpinning of critical evaluation of Gandhi's life and actions and ideas by Bose. For Bose Gandhi's passive resistance was necessary at an hour of history, but hardly sufficient. He wanted the resistance to become active. While it was the time that through Gandhi "the masses of India have learnt how to strick at the powerful enemy even without arms", and under Gandhi's leadership it was "demonstrated that it was possible to paralyse the administration through the weapon of passive resistance," but "while passive resistance can hold up or paralyse a foreign administration, it cannot overthrow or expel it, without the use of physical force

... The people today are spontaneously passing on from passive to active resistance ... The best stage will come when active resistance will develop into an armed revolution. Then will come the end of British rule in India.”⁴⁰

Much of Gandhi’s views of life and the world appeared irrational to Bose. The Swaraj Party was “a rationalist revolt against the Mahatma and his philosophy.”⁴¹ Bose considered one of the reasons for Gandhi’s failure was his playing “two roles in one person”. Reviewing Gandhi’s role in England Bose commented that “Sometimes he conducted himself not as a political leader who had come to negotiate with the enemy, but as a master who had come to preach a new faith – that of non- violence and world-peace.”⁴² Bose did not share Gandhi’s code of ethics, and it is to be conjectured if Gandhi would have used the term “enemy” at all for the British. Bose had even suggested, “If...the Mahatma had spoken in the language of Dictator Stalin or Il Duce Mussolini or Fuehrer Hitler – John Bull would have understood and would have bowed his head in respect.”⁴³ Gandhi and Bose differed in their perceptions of the political situations and responded according to their respective scale of values. Bose himself mentions Gandhi’s “goodness, his frankness, his humble way, his profound considerations for his opponents”,⁴⁴ and notes that all these were construed as weakness. Bose even quotes one of Gandhi’s characteristic remark that he would not be prepared to gain freedom at the cost of Britain’s ruin. The magnanimousness of the remark did not work on the British politicians. As Bose thought, the problem with Gandhi was his playing two roles in one person, that of a political leader and that of a world-teacher. Whether one agrees with Bose or no is another matter. The point is that he thought that way. Bose was for keeping political dealings apart from the higher callings of truth and non-violence. On this score Gandhi would not compromise. One might recall Radhakrishnan’s remark about Gandhi that he was a politician among the saints and a saint among the politicians.

Bose thought that Gandhi was politically a bad bargainer, “The instinct, or the judgment, so necessary for political bargaining is lacking in him.” He gives more than he takes”.⁴⁵ There was another difference between Gandhi and Bose as regards their perspective of history. Gandhi stood on his native moorings except perhaps his admiration for and deriving inspiration from Tolstoy, Thearou and John Ruskin. These were hardly political in nature. On the contrary, Bose was wide awake of the global political scenario in Europe, and Japan in the Far East. One of his points of inspiration was the Irish nationalist struggle against Britain. Bose’s nationalism or patriotism was more international in nature than Gandhi’s. Moreover, Bose thought that the Indian struggle⁴⁶ was a continuation of the revolt of 1857. It is a matter of doubt if Gandhi ever thought that way. Bose thought that imperialist power could only be thrown out with military might. That is what is evident from his adventuresome heroism after his escape from India amply testified.

Between 1933 and 1936 Bose traveled practically the whole of Europe outside Russia and studied at first hand the conditions and the growth of the new forces. Bose was convinced that India should make the fullest use of the international crisis of 1939. He stood for “the policy of immediate, uncompromising and all out fight against the British rule in India”.⁴⁷ Bose’s closing passages to *The Indian Struggle* bears a reference to Gandhi’s speech after the “Quit India” resolution was adopted. “In a stirring ninety minutes speech”, Gandhi “gave expression to his determination to fight to the finish even if he stood alone against the whole world”.⁴⁸ This must have pleased Bose in Europe during World War II. At the time of writing the cited passage Bose had escaped from India, and was busy with performing the historical and stupendous task of raising the Indian National Army to strike the British at India’s frontier at Kohima. The rest is history.

Gandhi and Bose had been the two ‘movers and shakers’ of pre-independent politics in India. To revert to the epic analogy, following R. Zehner’s account of Gandhi in *Hinduism*⁴⁹, we might say that if Gandhi played

the role of Yudhisthira, then Bose has been a veritable incubation of Arjuna in terms of his valour, courage, and the final heroic power to strike.

However, our intention in juxtaposing Gandhi and Bose has been to getting an idea of Bose's political ideology, and his concept of State that he might have had for an independent India. It is to that direction now we propose to proceed.

IV

Bose's political ideology has been socialism. For Bose 'socialism' is analytically connected with Leftism. His concept of Leftism meant anti-imperialism. This is a point we have earlier noted. He said, "After the attainment of political independence Leftism will mean Socialism".⁵⁰ Bose has also clarified the point that he does not by 'socialism' mean 'communism', 'Socialism' is a polyguous concept and there are socialisms of various complexions and intentions, and even connotations. Bose had his own term for Socialism; 'Samyavada', by which he meant 'the doctrine of synthesis of equality'.⁵¹ He considered Communism and Fascism as antithetical. But he points out a number of similarities between the outlooks. We may have then in his own words: "Both communism and Fascism believe in the supremacy of the State over the individual. Both denounce parliamentary democracy. Both believe in party rule. Both believe in the dictatorship of the party and in the ruthless suppression of all dissenting minorities. Both believe in a planned industrial reorganization of the country".⁵² Bose hoped that his *Samyavada* would be a sort of synthesis of the common traits. In a statement issued from Geneva in 1933 Bose reiterated his idea of the future political states of affairs in free India. He did not suggest a short cut to either communism or Fascism. In one of his insightful remarks about socio-political theories, he observed that such theories, etc., "are products of their history, environment and needs".⁵³ Hence they are "... liable to change and development just as human life is." We should not mortgage our intellect anywhere, he said. In delineating his own view he proposed to study with critical

sympathy all the movements and experiments carried on in Europe and America. Accordingly, he enunciated the following “essential features of the future”:

“Firstly, India must be consolidated under a strong central government before we can hope for an internal reconstruction and security from external attack. Secondly, a strong and disciplined party must be organized before we can hope for a national government and entire nation must be brought under the influence and control of this party. Thirdly, this party must stand for the masses as distinct from the vested interests. It must stand for justice for all sections of the people and for freedom from bondage of every kind whether political, economic or social. In order to ensure justice and freedom for all, the party must stand for the principle of equality and work for the destruction of all artificial barriers whether of religion, creed, castor, sex or wealth. Thus is should aim at a really democratic state in which we shall all be equal and in which there will be no problem of minorities. I would call this party the ‘Samyavadi-Sangha’ of India”.⁵⁴

Bose’s idea of democracy was distinguished from what he called “the mid-Victorian”⁵⁵ understanding of the concept. He admired the experiments of party empowerment in Russia, Italy and Germany, and even Turkey of Kamal Ataturk. “ ‘Dictatorship of the party both before and after Swaraj is won’ – that must be our slogan for the future”⁵⁶ was Bose’s cherished ideal. In the considered opinion of Bose the Fabian Socialism of England along with its parliamentary constitutionalism would de-radicalise the progressive and radical elements of society. The “party of the future”⁵⁷ would have to be devoted to the establishment of a socialist regime: “The Samyavadi Sangha will stand for all round freedom for the Indian people – that is, for social, economic and political freedom. It will wage a relentless war against bondage of every kind till the people can become really free. It will stand for political independence for India, so that a new state can be created in free India on the basis of the eternal principles of justice, equality and freedom”.⁵⁸

Bose thought of “Intellectual and practical preparation” for the future possibility of freedom and the means to be adopted for achieving it. Of these, two are significant and deserve mention. (a) “A scientific examination of the rise and fall of empires in other parts of the world” and (b) “A scientific examination of the history of freedom movements in other lands and a study of the gradual evolution of freedom in all its aspects in this world.”⁵⁹ For Bose a political campaign is an objective movement, hence the movement of the future must rest on an objective and scientific foundation. Bose further contended that if the leaders are not trained for post-war leadership, then after the conquest of power a period of chaos would set in. This is the lesson Bose learnt from the aftermath of the French Revolution.

Bose contended that Communism in India “lacked a proper national perspective, and could not develop as the organ of national struggle”.⁶⁰ It did not have its roots in the soil. In order to solving the problems of our national life, when India is free, Bose is unambiguous in saying that “original thought and fresh experiment will be necessary”.⁶¹ The experience of the older generation would be of no avail. The socio-economic conditions of free India would be altogether different from the colonial times. “In industry, agriculture, land tenure, money, exchange, currency, education prison administration, public health, etc. new theories and novel experiments will have to be devised”.⁶² (ibid). Bose noted that in Europe old theories in every department of life was being challenged and new theories were taking place. The same thing, Bose said, will happen in India. “Free India will not be a land of capitalists, landlords and castes. Free India will be a social and political democracy”.⁶³ What is worth mentioning in this context is that Bose did not adopt an apriori approach to problem solving. His awareness of historical changes taking place all over the world was a sort of open book to him. A strong empirical foundation of his thinking gave him an edge over others to foresee the future course of

international politics and plan and extend his strategies. Bose was a political realist with a pragmatic mode of action.

VI

We may now put some concluding remarks. Bose was a great resistance leader. He went about in Europe collecting data regarding reconstruction of the future independent India. His ideas were positively left-oriented though his socialism was of a pragmatic nature. He preferred revolutionary to reformist methods. Without compromising his fundamental democratic attitude towards government, Bose held that during the transitional period of the first few decades a strong and centralized regime would be desirable in India if India wanted to make a success of the political system of it after freedom. He saw it clearly that the Indian nation, composed of different racial and religious groups holding different ethical and moral values could only be integrated fully and assured of a happy future when all these elements could be brought within a free society under a certain authority. Bose urged that India must break away from many of its immobile traditions which no longer served any useful purpose. In this regard he had Turkey's example in his mind.

As regards Bose's views on the methods of struggle, Romain Rolland records, "he does not regard terrorism as a healthy policy and he is in favour of organised resistance".⁶⁴ There are important musings as regards "the exact form of the future Indian state". Bose wanted "the requirements of the Indian situation" be considered, but, he went to add, "One thing, however, is certain. There will be a strong Central Government, without such a Government, order and public security could not be safeguarded. Behind this Government will stand a well-organized disciplined all-India party, which will be the chief instrument for maintaining national unity".⁶⁵

Bose wished that the state will guarantee complete religious and cultural freedom for individual and groups and there will be no state religion. In the matter of political and economic rights there will be perfect equality among the whole population. He believed that when every individual has employment, food

and education and has freedom in religious and cultural matters, there will be no more any minorities' problem in India.⁶⁶ Bose looked upon the resolution of 1857 as a paradigm of national unity. "The war was fought under the flag of Bahadur Shah, a Mohamedan, and all sections of the people joined in it".⁶⁷ He held the view that the minorities problem in India has been "an artificial creation of the British similar to the Ulster problem in Ireland and the Jewish problem in Palestine. In an article called "Free India and Her Problems", Bose has dealt with such other issues like social problems, finance, Planning Committee and International Relations in a succinct manner. He preferred to have industrialization and organization of the army, navy and air force with the help of scientific and technical expertise of the West. But, for Bose, more important was: "In return, India could contribute something to the common culture and civilization of humanity, in religion and philosophy, in architecture, in painting, dancing and music and in other arts and handicrafts, India could offer something unique to the World".⁶⁸ It was to that end that Bose asked young Indians to fulfil a gigantic task, overcoming tremendous difficulties. He assured us that at the end there will be "joy and glory of struggle and ultimate victory".

Since Bose disappeared from the scene, the world political situation has changed profoundly. British imperialism has been defeated in a large part of Asia and has ceased to be a major threat to human freedom and progress. But that is not to say that imperialism has disappeared from the earth's surface. In fact, it may well have evolved into more sinister forms. In this perspective the impassioned anti-imperialist fire of Bose turns all the more brightly. Bose remains a singular example of a dedicated national revolutionary with a meiotic faith in India's historic obligation to evolve a new social order on the basis of a synthesis of all known revolutionary social experiments. Herein lies Bose's lure as well as relevance today.

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Chapter VI

M.N. Roy: From Marxism to Humanism

Manabendra Nath Roy, whose earlier name was Narendranath Bhattacharya, is the exponent of Radical Humanism. His political career has undergone radical changes. It can be divided into three periods. In the early life, he was an anarchist and worked in close cooperation with the leaders of the *Yugantar* Group, a secret political organisation, of undivided Bengal. In the second period, he became initiated to communism. He was called to Russia and became the advisor of the Bolshevik Party on colonial problems. Towards the later period of his life, he gave up communism, and became an exponent of Radical Democracy. V. M. Tarkunde, in his introduction to Roy's *New Humanism*, has distinguished these phases in Roy's life. But there is another phase when Roy propagated the decolonization thesis. It is a draft resolution on the Indian question, the gradual decolonization of India, which will be allowed eventually to evolve out of the status of dependence to the Dominion Status.

Roy's political thought has two sides – the polemical and the constructive. The polemical part consists of a detailed criticism of different aspects of Marxism. The constructive position consists of an elaboration of his own social and political thinking.

About the historical background of Roy's criticism of Marxism, we may mention that in the late twenties there was a breach between Roy and the Communist International. Later, in his book, *The Russian Revolution*,¹ he made some pungent criticism of the Stalinist regime – Stalin's sectarianism and extreme leftism which precluded the possibility of international communism. The sociological and philosophical writings of Roy roughly between 1948-1954 indicate this progressive breaking away from his Marxist antecedents and affiliations. As a person Marx evokes great praise from Roy. He regards Marx as a merciless critic of social injustice in the tradition of the great Hebrew

prophets.² He regards Marx's impassioned moral plea for social justice as a legacy of the Jewish prophets. He admits that "Marx was a passionate Humanist; and, with a burning faith in revolution, he was also a romanticist".³ There was also the 'original moral radicalism' in Marx which was "completely forgotten by his orthodox exponents, who made a political Jesuitism out of their faith".⁴ Roy was particularly aggrieved when he found that Stalin denied the moral values of the progressive force, and was keen to spread military power to attain supremacy. Roy wanted to reinstate the 'humanist, libertarian, moralist' kernel of Marxism after freeing it from the dogmatism of economic determinism.⁵ So far as the teachings of Marx are concerned either Roy abandoned them or introduced substantial changes in them. In any case, he looked beyond communism.

In the critical part of his thought Roy concentrates on what he considers as the limitations of Marxism, namely, Marx's concept of history, the dialectical methodology of Marx, Marx's concept of surplus value and the complete marginalisation of the individual. This has the purpose of leading to the positive doctrine of New Humanism or Radical Humanism, envisaging the partyless democracy. We shall discuss Roy's critique of Marxism in some details because of its importance for understanding his positive doctrine.

In line with the humanist tradition of India Roy puts much emphasis on man and his freedom, the evolutionary character of it. In striking similarity to Tagore, whom he does not mention though, Roy says: "History is the record of man's struggle for freedom". The difference between the two is that Roy, though he recognizes the creative role of intelligence and seeks to replace the term 'matter' by 'physical being', subscribes to a materialistic conception of history and a materialistic worldview. History, he points out explicitly, cannot be considered as merely a succession of events. It is an organic evolution. Man is not the slave of any supernatural power. Man is also not to be taken as a biological entity. It is true that for Roy, ideas themselves are biologically determined, but once the biologically determined process of ideation is

complete, and ideas are formed, they continue to have an autonomous existence. How they come to acquire an independent existence of their own is not explained by Roy. But by recognising the independent role of ideas, Roy is able to maintain that even human organisms can engage the environment, and even can avoid competition among groups. "History, therefore, does not follow the Marxist pattern of dialectics, but is a movement from homogenous masses to the evolution of distinct individualities experimenting in various forms of harmonisation between themselves".⁶

The Marxist interpretation of history is defective, according to Roy, because it allows a very slender role to mental activity in the social process. History cannot be explained solely with reference to materialistic objectivism. The intelligence of human beings and their cumulative actions are very powerful social forces. In the Marxist philosophy of history, ideas are regarded as the epiphenomena of matter and consciousness is a late arrival in the scale of evolution. Although, some of the later Marxists tried to introduce the concept of interaction between ideas and social forces in place of the older theory of the dominance of the material on social reality, it remains true that in the Marxist philosophy of history the creative role of ideas is minimised and the upholders of the doctrine of primacy of ideas, for example, the socialists of Germany, were ridiculed as Utopians.

Roy seeks to put forward a theory of history consisting of two parallel processes: ideal and physical. Ideas have a life of their own and logic of evolution of their own. There is a reciprocal relation between ideation and social processes, but at no specific historical context there "can be a causal relation traced between social events and movements of ideas"⁷. Roy writes "Philosophically, the materialist conception of history must recognize the creative role of intelligence. Materialism cannot deny the reality of ideas. They are not *sui generis*; they are biologically determined; priority belongs to the physical being, to matter, if the old-fashioned term may still be used. But once the biologically determined process of ideation is complete, ideas are formed;

they continue to have an autonomous existence, an evolutionary process of their own, which runs parallel to the physical process of social evolution. The two parallel processes, ideal and physical, compose history. Both are determined by their respective logic or dynamics or dialectics. At the same time, they are mutually influenced, the one by the other. That is how history becomes an organic process".⁸ The theory of parallelism of ideas and the texture of objective society implies that no direct, specific correlation is possible between a system of ideas and a set of events. We may say that Roy subscribes to idealism, not in the sense of denying the objective reality of the material world but of having due regard for the fact that ideas have always played an autonomous role in history, is implied in the doctrine that man creates history.

Roy also criticises the Marxist economic interpretation of history. He says that before man became a *homo economicus* in quest of economic amenities he was guided by biological considerations. An anthropological study of the history of the primitive man indicates that the early activities and struggles of the human species were centered on finding out means of subsistence. These activities were directed and motivated by the urgent drives and urges which were biological in nature. Biology and not economics dictated the early activities of mankind. The theory of historical materialism is defective to the extent that it does not seek to explain and analyse the early history of man. Even in the later history of man there were diverse types of activity wherein mankind finds satisfaction but which could not be brought under the rubric of economics. Roy illustrates his point with reference to the emergence and growth of different ideologies in history. He points out, for example, that "A careful study of the economic conditions of the early Middle Ages shows that there was no causal connection between the rise of the trading class and the Renaissance; that humanist individualism was not a mere superstructure, nor a justification of any particular economic system".⁹ In support of Roy's contention we may bring in the case of Italy. In Italy itself, spectacular developments in literature and the arts were not complemented or followed by comparable developments in political economy or

the material conditions of the people. Italy was not a solitary instance. In Bengal, too, the impressive cultural achievements of the period from Rammohun Roy to Rabindranath Tagore did not lay the foundations of equivalent growth in political economy. How is one to explain or interpret this gap or dissimilarity of development between aesthetic-intellectual and material-economic elements? The Renaissance, Roy adds, was a phase in man's age-long struggle for freedom; it was a chapter in the cultural history of mankind which has its own logic and momentum – it was inspired more by the humanist, rationalist and scientific ideas of the ancient Greek civilization than by the economic interest and political ambition of the medieval trading class. No necessary relationship holds between economic determinism and philosophy of materialism. It is possible to be a materialist and accept divergent criteria of historical interpretation, for example, power determinism or climatological determinism or anatomical physiological determinism, because political power, climate and physiological system of the human species are also material forces. The relation between philosophical materialism and economic interpretation of history is not inevitable.

Roy thinks that the acceptance of the dialectical methodology introduces an idealistic element in Marxism. He says: "Misguided by the Hegelian schooling, Marx disowned the heritage of mechanistic naturalism and was carried away by the essentially idealistic concept of dialectics".¹⁰ The movement through thesis and antithesis is a characteristic of logical argumentation. It is ridiculous to say that matter and forces of production move dialectically. Roy says: "The dialectical materialism of Marx, therefore, is materialist only in name; dialectics being its cornerstone, it is essentially an idealistic system. No wonder that it disowned the heritage of the eighteenth century scientific naturalism and fought against the humanist materialism of Feuerbach and his followers"¹¹. Roy emphatically states that dialectic is a category of idealistic logic. "The idealism of the dialectic method cannot be suppressed".¹²

Roy was also critical of the theory of surplus value as advanced by Marx. Marx elaborates the theory of surplus value in Part III of the *Capital*. We shall outline Marx's theory of surplus value before we undertake Roy's critique of it. A commodity, says Marx, is a product of labour. It has a use and is produced for the purpose of exchange. A commodity, therefore, has a twofold nature: a use-value and an exchange-value. The use-value of a commodity is determined by expenditure of human labour. It is determined by the quantity of socially necessary labour time embodied in it. Further, Marx points out that money gets transformed into capital, when the capitalist and the owner of money is able to buy the labour power of the worker. Labour power becomes a commodity which is bought and sold. Labour power is used to produce a new power greater than its own. If, for example, the worker labours six hours to produce the value of his own labour power, then all the time he works for more than six hours to produce a surplus value. The capitalist buys labour power in order to use it for the production of commodities, of values, and of surplus value. The surplus value accrues solely from the expenditure of labour power, i.e., from the worker working longer than the time necessary to reproduce the value of his own labour power. The rate of surplus value measures the degree of exploitation of the worker. It is defined as the ratio of the total surplus value produced to the variable capital expended. In the capitalist production there is a constant drive to increase the rate as well as the mass of surplus value, i.e., to increase the exploitation of the worker. In short, Marx shows that the process of capitalist production is a process of accumulation of capital. A given capital does not only reproduce itself, but by the conversion of the surplus value into capital multiplies itself many times over.

Roy considers the theory of surplus value to be a fallacy. According to him, it is not peculiar to Capitalism as Marx thinks. All social progress depends on it and Roy also calls it 'social surplus' and 'lever of progress'. The Marxist demand for the abolition of surplus value is impractical and even suicidal; social surplus will disappear if production of surplus value is ever stopped; then, with

the disappearance of the lever of progress, society will stagnate and eventually break down. Roy, however, points out that Marx did not expressly prescribe the abolition of surplus value; though that must be done if 'exploitation' of labour was ever to cease. Marx held that under Capitalism, production of surplus value represented exploitation of labour because it is appropriated by one class. Roy holds that such appropriation by one particular class is certainly an undesirable system, and it must go. But the sanction for the demand must be moral and not economic; it is a demand for social justice. It could not be made in the context of an economic theory from which a political doctrine was deduced. Roy contends that surplus value is produced in the socialist economy of Russia also. Otherwise, the rapid industrial expansion there after the revolution cannot be explained; rapid expansion of industries implies quicker and larger accumulation, and hence larger margin of surplus value. Roy says: "It is implicitly admitted in Marxism that even under the socialist economic system social surplus will be produced; and it is explicitly demanded that, for the establishment of Socialism, the expropriator should be expropriated by the proletariat. That evidently means that, under the new order, the social surplus will be appropriated by the new ruling class – the proletariat, pending the advent of the utopia of a classless and stateless society"¹³. Thus, according to Roy, the creation of surplus value is essential for both capitalist and socialist systems. The demand for the abolition of surplus value is simply the politicalisation of an economic fact of production. Roy observes: "If production of surplus value represents exploitation of labour, then, labour was exploited also under Socialism; and it must be admitted that under the socialist economy of Russia labour is even more exploited – to produce larger surplus value to be accumulated into new capital".¹⁴ Class struggle is read into the economic state of affairs, and this paved the way of revolution in the sense of overthrowing the capitalist system of production.

Roy also casts doubt on the Marxist theory of the polarisation of the capitalist society into two classes and the consequent theory of class struggle. He says that Marx was not correct in his statement about the disappearance of the middle class. Roy accepts that the decline of capitalism spells also the destitution of the middle class, but he also regards Socialism as an ideology conceived by the middle class intellectuals. To put it in his words: "The decay of Capitalism economically ruined the middle class. The result was quickening of the will for the subversion of the *status quo*, which made no place for them, and the striving for a new order".¹⁵ Because of their economic destitution, the middle class was ready to join the proletariat in the fight for Socialism. But by Socialism, they meant not State Capitalism but a more equitable social order that was not exclusively based on economic conditions but on the appreciation of moral and cultural values as the positive outcome of human civilisation. In matters of decisive importance such as culture and education, the middle class remained a distinct social factor capable of influencing events. He remarks: "Socialism, indeed, is a middle class ideology. Detached both from the antagonistic camps – of capital and labour – and possessed of the requisite intellectual attainments, the middle class alone could produce individuals who saw beyond the clash of immediate economic interests and conceived the possibility of a new order of justice and harmony".¹⁶ Roy points out that Lenin saw the mistake of excluding the middle class, and tried to rectify it, but only in the field of organization. Theoretically, Lenin remained loyal to orthodox Marxism; he would not recognize the revolutionary significance of the middle class. If the economic determinism of Marxism is to be taken into consideration, the proletariat must be the most backward class. Yet, Marxism allots to the proletariat the role of leading society towards a new order, a higher civilization. The proletariat is still to develop their culture and morality; the middle class is thoroughly disregarded, and the communist movement has no use for capitalist culture and bourgeois morality. In such a situation there arises a vacuum; "...a new philosophy of revolution suitable for our age, is yet to arise as the beacon light for civilised

humanity”.¹⁷ Roy concludes that the economic dogmatism of Marxism and its cynical attitude to moral and cultural values alienated the middle class splitting the forces of revolution. “Selfish economism eclipsed the moral appeal of Socialism”.

Roy’s criticism of the Marxian view does not mean that he favours Parliamentary Democracy. Democracy has two forms, direct and indirect. Direct democracy was prevalent in the city states of Greece. In large states of today it is not feasible. We find indirect democracy or representative democracy. Representative democracy is of two forms, namely, Presidential and Parliamentary. In the U. S. A., there is Presidential Democracy. India, after independence, has adopted, like Britain, Parliamentary system of Democracy. According to Roy, representative government means the rule of the party. Parliamentary Democracy, he says, is benevolent despotism. In democracy, heads are counted to get majority opinion. But it does not give any freedom to the individual heads. Roy writes: “Democratic practice which is no more than mere counting of heads, in the last analysis, is also a homage to the collective ego. It allows scope neither for the individual nor for intelligence. Under the formal parliamentary system, unscrupulous demagogues can always come to the top. Intelligence, integrity, wisdom, moral excellence, as a rule, count for nothing. Yet, unless the purifying influence of these human values is brought to bear upon the political organization and administration of society, the democratic way of life can never be realised”.¹⁸ Mechanical counting of heads will cease to be the criterion of democracy. Moreover, democracy does not work when the heads have not the opportunity to raise themselves with sovereign dignity. Roy, therefore, becomes dissatisfied with both Marxism and Parliamentary Democracy because the former is a total eclipse of the individual by institutions and the latter, because of multiple party politics and unprincipled scramble for power. Neither the one party rule guided by the principle of centralization of power in a few hands as it prevailed in the U.S.S.R and the People’s Republic of China nor the Parliamentary Democracy as it prevailed in

the West will do. He maintains that a democracy to get rid of the defects of both Marxism and Parliamentary Democracy must orient itself to the humanistic values of radical type. This he finds in his conception of Radical Democracy, which is based on the ethical foundation of New Humanism or Radical Humanism.

Roy's understanding of nature, man, history and man's value-orientation are best indicated by these two words, 'radical' and 'humanism'. Humanism is a philosophy which affirms that man makes history, that every human being is the reservoir of creative potentialities, that unfoldment of these creative potentialities is the measure of personal growth and social progress, that all the achievements of the human species are the common heritage of mankind and not special possession of particular groups, that every individual is unique and valuable in himself or herself, that the protection and promotion of the freedom of every individual is essential to good society, that scientific temper and knowledge are the necessary conditions of human growth, and that the pursuit of truth requires both intellectual steadfastness and toleration of doubts and differences. These are incorporated in the twenty two theses of *New Humanism*, though they do not exhaust the implications of humanism spread out in the voluminous writings of Roy. They, however, serve the purpose of explicating what Roy means by humanism.

As a protagonist of human freedom, Roy asserts that freedom rests on the three pillars of individualism, rationalism and humanism. In these intellectual explorations, Roy was steadily moving away from Marxism towards a new philosophy of life. According to him, freedom is the fundamental principle which guides all of human aspirations and activities. Humanity consists of a basic urge for freedom from the bondage of natural phenomena and social limitations. Quest for freedom is a continuation of the biological struggle for existence and adaptation. The apparent antagonism among various doctrines and ideologies can be transcended only through a common concept of freedom. In modern civilization, an individual requires not only economic independence but

also deliverance from social and cultural regimentation in order to attain freedom. Without this, the inherent potentialities of man cannot attain manifestation. Depending on this the criterion of the progress of any social set up may be ascertained. The more the freedom given to the individual, the more advancement is achieved by society. Primary and secondary groups have been formed by individuals in course of their hankering for freedom from physical, physiological, and social obstacles. Cooperative social living is worthwhile only when it helps in unfolding man's rational, moral and creative potentialities. In the words of Roy: "The sum-total of the freedom actually enjoyed by its members individually is the measure of the liberating or progressive significance of any social order. Otherwise, the ideals of social liberation and progress are deceptive".¹⁹

The keynote of Roy's criticism of Marxism is the latter's negation of freedom and creativity of the individual. He is critical of the Marxian glorification of the social struggle without adequate attention to the worth and significance of the individual. Any political philosophy which underestimates the concepts of individuality and freedom as empty abstractions is bound to suffer from bankruptcy in the long run. The fate of men of flesh and blood cannot be successfully subordinated to an abstract collective ego for any political and economic experiment. Progress of society is fully functional upon human freedom. He says: "Society is a creation of man - in quest of freedom".²⁰ Elsewhere, he expresses the same conviction saying that "We find that society is the creation of individuals. The individual comes first; he is prior to society; society is the means of attaining an end, which is freedom and progress of the individual. But the end has been forgotten. A false conception of the place of man in society is the wrong juxtaposition of end and means; the divorce of ethics from political practice and social engineering. That in its turn is the cause of the present crisis. Unless we go to the root of this crisis, we cannot overcome this".²¹

In the *New Humanism: A Manifesto*, this theme of the sovereignty of the individual is mentioned again and again, and explains Roy's criticism of the cult of totalitarianism. To denote Communism, Roy repeatedly uses two terms, namely, State Capitalism and Totalitarianism. Totalitarianism was a new term when Roy started to use it, and the need for it arose from the emergence of a new thing, namely, a system of political organization which the world did not experience before the twentieth century. "Despotism" is a word which has many affinities with Totalitarianism. Despotism is a very ancient, very widespread and very familiar form of government. But while totalitarian government may well be called despotic, it is more than despotism. Roy considers the "totalistic ideology" as the main feature of Totalitarianism. Roy also sees terror as an important factor of totalitarian regime, but according to him, terror is to be seen in relation to ideology. Roy notes that one feature of the totalitarian regime is the extent in which political and social issues are fused together in such a way as to produce a community in which there is paradoxically very little in the way of either political or social life. The regime permeates everything: all groups, all institutions, even the family itself. Totalitarianism, as the very concept of totality implies, is a package. In other words, the most totalitarian regime is the one where the penetration of the regime into the individual is complete.

It is in this context that Marx's concept of alienation may be viewed differently from Roy's concept of alienation. However, in his writings, Roy does not fully develop his theory of alienation. Marx's concept of alienation is found in *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844 (discovered in 1820's). Marx wrote that man acts in society through objectivisation (externalisation) of aspects of the self via things he creates (reification) or conditions he transforms or spiritual values he puts down in writing or uses in speech, etc. If and when the creations of man win an autonomous existence, independent of man, man is not able to oppose the process. Alienation follows: man becomes an appendix to the world of matter; he becomes alien to himself as a subject (auto alienation), and his creation dominates him. Thus, goods produced by the worker become

independent of their producer and gain domination over him, his own labour power becomes an object. Marx believed that alienation can be abolished only under revolutionary conditions and in a revolutionary way. The abolition of alienation requires the abolition of private property; the abolition of capitalistic system will be tantamount to the abolition of alienation. Roy's thesis is that the abolition of private property does not necessarily mean the end of alienation in all forms of social life. Roy develops in this context both empirical and theoretical structures.

Roy reaches the above conclusion in an empirical way, on the basis of his experiences in the Soviet Union. His theory that a socialist state (Roy uses the word State Capitalism) will not be a state of universal happiness, but there will exist in it difficulties and conflicts in relation between people, and there may arise new sources and new stimuli, which will weigh upon human happiness even more strongly and more negatively than the present one. The socialist state would remain in a state of alienation.

Contrary to the Marxist thesis, even after the abolition of social classes the state will not wither away. It will continue to exist. There will exist a group of people or stratum fulfilling administrative functions. It will be even more numerous and more powerful than the old one, because the tasks of the state are bound to increase and become more complicated. Thus, the split which sets society at variance will continue to exist. It will no longer be a split in the old class lines, because the private property or private ownership of the means of production will disappear. Nevertheless, the danger of alienation arising from privileges of the ruling group will remain. Roy warns against imposing a general *obligatory* model of human happiness which would transform itself into terrible tyranny. Roy wanted to purge Marxism of its utopian elements and its inherent millennial expectations.

In his quest for freedom, Roy is opposed to centralisation of power which amounts to the negation of free initiative and autonomous choice. Political parties with their countrywide organisation and vast financial resources become

agents of centralization. Despite the quest for Sovietism, in the U.S.S.R., the centralising, dominating role of the Communist Party is the key factor, according to Roy, in Russian economics and politics. The Communist Party is the basic factor for centralization, acting as the counterpoise to the autonomy of the component units. Roy thus is opposed to the conception of political power as the sole instrument for effecting social change.

Humanism, we have seen above, is critical of tradition and the established order. Radicalism, on the other hand views tradition and the established order with complete distrust. It seeks to minimize the influence of the former and to replace the latter by an entirely new and more rational and moral system. One is a radical because one seeks change from the root and does not believe that the existing state of things can be really improved by pruning something here or tinkering with something else there. Radicalism views history as a constant struggle between freedom and unfreedom, knowledge and prejudice, justice and injustice. The radical is inspired by the vision of a society the realisation of which is believed to be within the competence of men and women. Such realisation requires overthrow of the oppressive system with its vested interests and repressive mores. The question that arises is whether violence is involved in the destruction of a regime which is itself based on violence. Roy does not commit anything on this point except that: "Any effort for a reorganization of society must begin from the unit of society – from the root so to say"²². Further on, he also speaks of the 'destruction of the *status quo*', describes the fight for freedom 'as the struggle between David and Goliath', its consequence 'as the destruction of the Frankenstein, and the taming of the Leviathan'. Understandably enough, these cannot happen without some amount of violence. Roy. However, never uses radicalism to harbour violence. Radical, for him, means total and not piecemeal. It takes into account every spect of social life. He goes on to say that "Radicalism thinks in terms neither of nation nor of class; its concern is man; it conceives freedom as the freedom of the individual"²³. His radical humanism is New Humanism. The word "new" has been significantly

used. Man has been treated from a new or novel point of view. Scientific outlook lies at the back of the concept of man. Its main thirst is on reason, ethics, freedom, sovereignty of man and human will as the most powerful determining factor of history. New humanism tries to go to the genesis of man and to examine the background out of which man emerges in nature. Whatever we call human nature, man's attributes and potentialities be strictly derived from the background of the evolving physical universe. It is "new", "because it is Humanism enriched, reinforced and elaborated by scientific knowledge and social experience gained during the modern civilization. Some of Roy's close associates, however, are of the opinion that "The radical is persuaded that application of force, guided by reason and morality and directed towards freedom and justice, can be kept within bounds, except where the upholders of the oppressive regime would rather destroy the society than concede defeat, even when they have completely lost credibility and public support. The radical would take the risk of temporary chaos and disorder than allow a fundamentally unjust and immoral state of affairs to continue indefinitely".²⁵

The synthesis of humanism and radicalism in Roy took shape during a Study Camp in 1946 at Dehradun where he was living then. The position outlined at the camp and subsequently developed and elaborated in the Twenty Two Theses in *New Humanism* and *In Man's Own Image*, offer reconciliation of humanism and radicalism. Now, the question is: As a radical humanist what kind of state does Roy envision? He is not in favour of an autonomous National State. He has the ideal of One World, or a World Government.²⁶ Such an ideal is not compatible with the idea of National States. The State, Roy envisages, will be a cosmopolitan State, "a cosmopolitan commonwealth of free men and women ... It will be a spiritual community, not limited by the boundaries of national States – capitalist, fascist, communist or of any other kind – which will gradually disappear under the impact of cosmopolitan Humanism. That is the Radical perspective of the future of mankind".²⁷ Democracy, for Roy, must have philosophical reorientation in the sense that "a government composed of

spiritually free individuals, accountable, in the first place, to their respective conscience, is the only possible guarantee for securing the greatest good to the greatest number".²⁸ The ideal of Radical Democracy will be attained through the collective efforts of spiritually free men and women united with the determination of creating a new order of freedom. "Ultimately, the Radical Democratic State will rise with the support of enlightened public opinion as well as intelligent action of the people".²⁹

From this it will be clear that Roy will not subscribe to the doctrine of the withering away of the state. State is an essential condition for the social living of man. Roy makes the incisive observation: "We must take it for granted that Karl Marx honestly believed that under socialism class distinctions would disappear, and therefore the State as a class organisation would wither away. But one cannot help feeling that that was a naïve belief; it was wishful thinking. How could a keen intellect be reconciled to such a belief? The zeal to prove that communism was not a utopia lured Marx away towards the uncertain ground of speculation, and he made dogma out of speculative thought. So long as a stateless society remains inconceivable, communism could not be anything but utopia. Therefore, for the sake of his 'scientific' socialism, Marx had to postulate the withering away of the state. Either, at the point, Marx came very near to anarchism – also a utopia – or he did not think hard enough. The state is the political organization of society. How could a complicated, centralized, industrial society be ever without a state? This question should have occurred to Marx while he was casting the horoscope of humanity".³⁰ The same observation has been made by Roy in thesis no.9 of New Humanism. "The State being the political organisation of society, its withering away under Communism is a utopia which has been exploded by experience".³¹

Now, let us clarify that the words like "spiritual" and "conscience" which Roy often uses in articulating the thesis of new humanism do not signify any abstract, mysterious, transcendental dimensions of man. These expressions suggest the creative activities of man in the quest for social harmony and

beneficent social accommodation. Man derives his sovereignty not from any transcendental, super-physical being but from his creative achievements in the understanding and partial conquest of nature. Although man's ultimate roots are derived from physical nature, he is not submerged by that.

In the 1940's, Roy lectured and wrote extensively on the future political system for India. In these years, he made scathing attacks on the organisational structure of the Congress party. Realising that it is neither possible to change the Congress nor to provide another viable alternative party to the Congress, Roy started emphasising the need of guided democracy in which the enlightened rational citizens would make the individual citizen fully conscious of their sovereign right, and enable them to exercise it intelligently and conscientiously. Roy is, thus, critical both of the dictatorship of totalitarian states and parliamentary democracy and settles for Radical Democracy. The former subverts the freedom of the individual by making it a clog in the huge state machine. The totalitarian technique of regimentation leaves no room for individual initiative. The political ideology of Radical Democracy envisages the political set up that will be an alternative both to Communism and Parliamentary Democracy. According to Roy, it will be a partyless democracy. In opposition to centralisation of power, he emphasizes decentralization. The totalitarian technique of coordination, organisation and regimentation must not be allowed to subvert the freedom of the individual. Parliamentary Democracy in operation too is no better. It is full of grave defects. The people are powerless between elections. In critical times, even the rule of law affords little protection. Accordingly, Roy wants a democracy where the human reason and human resources would be pooled for the reconciliation of individual freedom and social good.

Roy's criticisms of Parliamentary Democracy are incorporated in the theses nos. 12 and 13 of the Appendix of *New Humanism*. Thesis 12 states: "The defects of formal Parliamentary Democracy have also been exposed in experience. They result from the delegation of power..."³² Thesis No 13 says:

“Liberalism is falsified or parodied under formal Parliamentary Democracy”.³³ Roy formulates, hence, the notion of organised democracy where there would not be imposition of the commands of the Leviathan seated on the top but local people’s committees will handle the power. Formal Parliamentary Democracy reduces the electorate to a helpless, atomised conglomeration. Roy pleads for the doing away of democratic centralism. Roy says: “The alternative to Parliamentary Democracy is not dictatorship; it is organised democracy in the place of the formal democracy of powerless atomised individual citizens. The parliament should be the apex of a pyramidal structure of the State reared on the base of a countrywide network of People’s Committees”.³⁴ He feels that intensive activities in villages and workshops would be more fruitful instruments of social transformation than the acquisition of political power through party organisation and consolidation of power. The essence of democratic set up is to foster the notion of participant citizenship. It is with this end in view that in the draft on “Constitution of Free India” Roy proposes the setting up of Peoples’ Committees at the grass-root level. He proposes that parties should be replaced by local committees. The local committees will be established in towns and villages. “Realising that freedom is inconsistent with concentration of power, Radical Humanists will not seek to capture power. They will help democracy organise itself in Peoples’ Committees, which will eventually become the organs of democratic power. The People’s Committees will remain the principle focus of democratic power. Thus, becoming coterminous with the entire society, the Radical Democratic State, as the organ for its political administration, will cease to be an instrument of coercion. At last, Democracy – government of the people and by the people – will be possible”.³⁵ Roy’s democratic State will be broad-based. The people can have a hand in the government only when a pyramidal structure of the State will be raised on a foundation of organized local democracies. Roy allots wide power to the Peoples’ Committees. These Committees, to be elected every year, and consisting of one fiftieth of the total number of voters in the locality, were to perform the following functions:

- a. They will be the school for the political and civil education of the citizen,
- b. nominate candidates to seek elections,
- c. have the right to recommend the recall of the representatives of the particular constituency,
- d. demand a referendum on any legislative or executive measure.³⁶

These functions and responsibilities enable them to wield a direct and effective control on the entire State machinery. The political organization will exclude delegation of power which in practice deprives the people of effective power. It will be based on the direct participation of the entire adult population through the countrywide People's Committees. Roy hopes that those People's Committees would "transcend the limits of party politics. Individual men will have a chance of being recognized on their merits. Party politics and party patronage will no longer eclipse intellectual independence, moral integrity and detached wisdom".³⁷

To-day, politicians are talking of starting planning from the grass-root level without acknowledging their indebtedness to M.N.Roy. This may be substantiated by Roy's own words. He says that "Political parties need vote to come to power. It is easy to sway the people by appeals to their emotions and prejudices". One wonders whether the pyramidal structure of government will do away with the state and its mechanical character.

Roy is opposed to the tentacles of monopoly. The growth of monopoly not only makes the economy imperfect but also creates vast centers of financial and industrial power. Roy is against concentration of power in any form. Hence, he considers it essential to do away with monopoly capitalism. To him the only alternative left is some form of economy based on widespread decentralisation. He champions cooperative economy wherein production is to be carried on with the sole purpose of serving human needs; economic re-organisation such as will guarantee a progressively rising standard of living, would be the foundation of

the Radical Democratic State. For the unfolding of the intellectual and other finer potentialities of man progressive satisfaction of the material necessities is the precondition. It is in this respect that Roy comes closer to Gandhi's theory of decentralisation, though he is a severe critic of Gandhi's "religious obscurantism". Ideas of Roy, emphasising the decentralisation of political power, are also later on echoed by Jai Prakash Narain in the mid-seventies.

But what Roy ignores is that the conditions for the functioning of these committees for the aims specified by him do not obtain and given the restriction on the right of freedom and speech to "the enemies of the people", these committees could become the very authoritarian structures which he is so keen to demolish from the polity of the country. Despite his emphasis on the realization of the conditions under which democracy can become possible, Roy remains oblivious of the conflicting interests in the political-economy of the country in his draft Constitution. It may be argued that Roy's model of organised democracy fails to visualise the clashing individual and group interests on the fond hope that the interests of the 'rational' individuals would not really clash. If progressive satisfaction of material necessities is the precondition for the individual members of society in unfolding their intellectual and other finer human potentialities then in a scarcity-ridden society as ours, Roy's ideal appears to be utopian. However, we should admit that in order to bring about any change in the established order requires positing an ideal and ideals are regulative principles, corrective of the existing state of affairs and not constitutive of them.

We may observe that although Roy moves away from Marxism and criticises the Marxist theory of revolution, he does not abandon his revolutionary ideals. Up to the end he remains committed to the ideology of revolution. To his last major work he gives the name *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*. Roy is able to complete this major theoretical undertaking in 1952 but actually from the thirties he began to see that cultural backwardness and psychological retrogression were among the principal obstacles to revolution. Without the

freeing of the mind of the common people from the powerful and pervasive influence of the authoritarian and obscurantist mode of thinking; without an awakening of the spirit of inquiry and self-affirmation, without, in short, a renaissance or a philosophical revolution, no revolution from below or grass-root democracy is likely to succeed. Unless this can be achieved the discontent of the masses is likely to be accentuated and utilised by unscrupulous political leaders to bring down an exhausted establishment to put themselves in the position of dictatorial power; but this may very well reduce whatever rights and liberties existed before, and usher in a totalitarian tyranny. This, in fact, happened in Germany, where the collapse of the Weimer Republic gave absolute power to the Nazis. Roy from the mid-thirties started to form the conviction that mass-discontent, mass-mobilisation and mass-struggle do not on their own ensure the replacement of an unjust regime by a just and democratic system. He stresses the fact that if the masses are not enlightened, if they continue to remain steeped in ignorance, if their energisation is brought about by stirring up their destructive passions, then a revolution will end in terror and dictatorship. A renaissance preceding a revolution may alone save the latter from the tragedy.

Roy's arguments, rather, convictions, are put forth in the two volumes of his magnum opus, *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*. In the first volume of the book, Roy makes an objective study and critical assessment of the first phase of modern civilization from the Renaissance to the French Revolution. In the second volume, he has analysed the subsequent major developments of the last one century and a half, and on the basis of his detailed and comprehensive investigation he has diagnosed the crisis of the twentieth century, and offered his solution. Roy does not exclude revolution from the view of the future, nor abjure his commitment to revolutionary ideals, but he gradually reaches the view that social, political and economic revolution must be preceded by or must synchronise with a cultural or philosophical revolution if the hazards of centralisation and dictatorship are to be eliminated. He often uses the term "renaissance" to describe this philosophical revolution, revolution in the realm

of ideas and values. In Radical Humanism he tries to weave into a whole the two distinct phases of revolution and renaissance.

However, the reconciliation is not without problems and their consideration may be neglected only at the cost of intellectual integrity and effectiveness. The problem may not greatly trouble those who are either 'pure' humanists or 'pure' radicals. A humanist may be content to bring about re-awakening, here and there hoping this will eventually lead to a renaissance. For him, renaissance whether limited or widespread is its own justification. Pursuit of truth, beauty and virtue is its own reward. The radical, on the other hand, is not prepared to wait for a renaissance to take place. If the renaissance is limited primarily to aesthetic and intellectual efflorescence, if it takes centuries to spread among the common people or to bring about a social revolution, then renaissance to him is an elitist luxury. For him, renaissance or no renaissance, structural change in a short period is what matters most. So, it becomes difficult to reconcile humanism and radicalism, renaissance and revolution in practice, although in theory, such harmonisation may not be beyond comprehension.

Despite the ambiguities and confusions in Roy's political thought it may be pointed out that his faith in the individual as a thinking being and maker of his own destiny, the importance of a rational reconstruction of the social and economic institutions for achieving the liberation of mankind, both at the individual and the collective levels are convictions which distinguish him from the Gandhian and other revivalist political thinkers. But these distinctive features should not make us oblivious to the threat of the despotism of the enlightened minority which lurks underneath his utopian ideals. This is a real worry in view of the fact that in spite of the broad-based character of Radical Democracy, the Council of State will be constituted of members drawn from professional groups of engineers, economists, scientists, medical men, jurists, and other persons engaged in intellectual, artistic, literary and in any other creative vocation. So the effective control of the State will be in the hands of an elitist minority, until the intellectual and moral level of the entire community is raised considerably.

So the renaissance of our time even if it starts with a gifted few, must actively involve sooner rather than later the general body of ordinary men and women in whom lies latent the power to recreate themselves and their society. This may defeat the forces of unreason and unfreedom in the name of justice and collective good.

There is another point to be considered. In his conception of revolution Roy seeks to combine rationalism with the romantic view of life. Romanticism has been defined in a variety of ways. Roy writes: "Originally, it was a tendency in art: but the theory of art indicates an attitude to life and life is a part of nature. Therefore, from the very beginning, romanticism was a way of life and as such had a philosophical significance, even if that was not clearly realised and formulated until a later period. There cannot be a culture without a philosophy. The men of the Renaissance, particularly those who represented its artistic and literary aspects, were the first to take a romantic view of life. Historically, romanticism is a form of the revolt of man against the tyranny of the supernatural. Philosophically and culturally, romanticism is identical with humanism."³⁸ Sheer irrationalism, spinning a cobweb of morbid fantasy, mysticism and sloppy sentimentality, which are conventionally conceived as romanticism, is not romanticism according to Roy. Romanticism is not irrationalism. It is the faith in the sovereignty of man and in his unlimited creativeness. The cardinal principle of romanticism is that man makes history – he is the maker of his own destiny. In the history of ideas the age of romanticism is the age of reason too. Reason was not altogether ruled out by the founders of the romantic theory of aesthetics. Reason should be coupled with the visions of romanticism. Roy has the project of revolution as a becoming of man, revolution which is informed by reason and romanticism, law and freedom, intelligence and will. They are inextricably interwoven and are not mutually exclusive in the future of man. Revolution cannot be divorced from the romantic vision of the future of human life itself. But passions should not lead us astray. Quoting from Thomas Paine's *Rights of Man* Roy avers that "... reason, perfected by reflection

must be the director of the whole host of passions. Reason must hold the rudder...”³⁹

New Humanism, Roy claims, reconciles the romantic doctrine of revolution, that man makes history, with the rationalist notion of orderly social progress. However, Roy is not very clear about how these opposites are to be reconciled in practice. Roy repeatedly speaks of education and science as preparing the emergence of an enlightened humanity. But the modalities of these were not worked out by him as did Tagore or Gandhi. Despite all these lacunas in his thought we must admit that it his is a great contribution to the history of political thought and philosophy of history. What is more it offers a constructive philosophy which may help mankind to overcome the crisis of modern age and usher in the free cosmopolitan society of the future.

Notes and References:

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2. *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, Vol. II, Calcutta: Renaissance Publ., 1955, p.219, also p.206.
3. *New Humanism: A Manifesto*, Delhi: Ajanta Publications, 1939, 4th print (1981), p.17.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
5. *Ibid.*
6. Sib Narayan , *Radical Humanism*, p.82.
7. *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, *op cit.*, p.309. For a refutation of the Cartesian psychophysical parallelism, see *ibid.*, p.267.
8. *Ibid*, Vol I, Calcutta: Renaissance Publ., 1952, p.11.
9. *Ibid.*, p.65.
10. *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, Vol. II, *op. cit.*, p.214.
11. *Ibid.*, p.186.
12. *Ibid.*, p199.
13. *New Humanism: A Manifesto*, *op. cit.*, pp.24-25.
14. *Ibid.*, p.25.
15. *Ibid.*, P.27.
16. *Ibid.*
17. *Ibid.*, p.32.
18. *Ibid.*, p.42. Also see *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution*, Vol. II, *op. cit.*, pp.278-279.
19. *Ibid.* , p.39.
20. *Ibid.*
21. Philip Sprata and M.N. Roy, *Beyond Communism*, p.87.
22. *New Humanism: A Manifesto*, *op. cit.*, p.36.
23. *Ibid.*
24. *Ibid.*, p.37.

25. Sib Narayan Roy, unpublished paper on "M.N.Roy, Revolution and Renaissance".
26. Dante, *On World Government*. Dante wrote a tract on the world government, which will be a rule of God, based on unity and peace.
27. *New Humanism: A Manifesto, op. cit.*, p.37.
28. *Ibid.*, p.44.
29. *Ibid.*, p.48.
30. *New Orientation*, p.147.
31. *New Humanism: A Manifesto, op. cit.*, p.56.
32. *Ibid.*, p.57.
33. *Ibid.*
34. *Ibid.*, p.58.
35. *Ibid.*, pp.48-49.
36. *Ibid.*, pp.44-45. Also see the twenty two theses nos. 14, 16, 18 and 20.
37. *Constitution of Free India-A Draft*, Delhi: Radical Democratic Party, 1944.
38. *Reason, Romanticism and Revolution, op. cit.*, p.25.
39. *Ibid.*, p.100.

Chapter VII

Concluding Remarks

In the 16th and 17th centuries there occurred the growth of European nationalism, extensive commodity production and world commerce. Asia, henceforth, became a mere field of operation for European imperialism and colonialism. The rise of the Industrial Revolution intensified the process of augmentation of economic and political power by Western nations. In the 18th century and the early part of the 19th century, the Asiatic countries presented a spectacle of economic decline, political prostration, social stagnation and cultural decadence. British rule came to be established in India as a systematic basis with the Anglo-French wars in South India, the battles of Plassey and Buxer, and the grant of the Dewani rights by Shah Alam. The introduction of the mighty force of British Imperialism harnessed with all the powers of diplomacy, statecraft and an advanced military armament appeared like a cataclysmic element in Indian politics. The failure of the patriotic struggle of 1857 buttressed British imperialistic hold on the country.

Since the middle of the 19th century the mind and soul of Asia have once again awakened. The forces of nationalism began to grow stronger, and there was a demand for social and economic reshaping. In the late 18th and early 19th centuries India came into direct contact with modern military technology and the advanced phases of Western rationalistic and scientific thought. With the introduction of Western education and learning in India a new spirit of intellectual quest was generated, and it applied itself to religious, social, economic and political problems. The teachings of reformer and religious leaders in India gave rise to the desire for an autonomous and self-determinate political existence. The awakening of the Indian spirit manifested its creativity in the realms of philosophy, religion and culture, and political self-consciousness came as an inevitable consequence. The renaissance in India was characterised

primarily by moral and spiritual aspirations. Revivalism had a dominant sway over the minds of certain section of the people. They advocated a deliberate modeling and moulding of the present life on the basis of the past scriptures. The sentiment of revivalism was generated as a reaction against the great challenge thrown by an alien, aggressive and arrogant civilization politically dominant and economically powerful. Out of this clash of the new mechanical civilisation of the Occident and the old pietistic and religious cultures of India, we find the emergence of new India.

As a defense mechanism against the impact of an alien political power in the country, the old cultures of the land began to revive and reassert themselves. A new humanist and cosmopolitan interpretation began to be put upon the old writings. Further, ideological researches strengthened the roots of cultural nationalism in India. Vivekananda's historic role at the Chicago Parliament of Religions in 1893 prepared the ground for the sentiments of self-reliance, strength and above all fearlessness among Indians. Subhaschandra Bose had testified to the role of Vivekananda as a hero-prophet of nationalism.

Nationalism in India is a complex and composite movement with both idealistic-spiritualistic and objective-materialistic roots. Take for instance, the case of Rammohan Roy. Monistic Theism was the metaphysical foundation of his thought. Following Locke and Thomas Paine, Roy accepted the immutable sanctity of natural rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of property, and he championed the moral rights of the individual. But Roy's theory of right was constructed in the prevailing Indian framework of common social good or *lokasamgraha*. Besides, being an exponent of individualist theory of rights and freedom, he also advocated state legislation for social reform and for educational reconstruction. Hence, to the concept of natural rights he added the notions of social unity and human welfare.

In course of the times, primacy of society came to be consciously adopted in political programmes. Rabindranath Tagore, for example, accepted a social

interpretation of history. According to him, man is a social, sensitive and imaginative being and not a mechanical entity or political animal. Like Comte and Durkheim Tagore accepted primacy of society. Politics is only a specialised and professionalised aspect of society. India's history was a manifestation of the continuing process of racial and social synthesis. In ancient India, there had been a separation of the political and social spheres. The home and the *āśrama* provided the force for the organisation of human energies. The people led their lives almost by ignoring the state. Politics had very shallow roots in society.

Tagore was a societarian to the extent that he regarded the society as having greater primacy than the state. He regarded the society as a spiritual organism. Man's moral and aesthetic consciousness takes its root from society. It is natural to man and responds to his social propensities. But Tagore believed in a functional conception of society. He was opposed to meaningless social stratifications which perpetuate social tyranny. The social organism can be a living totality only if the members are bound by the ties of mutual performance of duties and treat all sections equally. Tagore stood for human rights, but rights to him are not exclusive possessions, they proceed from disinterested contribution to higher good. "Men does not acquire rights through occupation of larger space, not through conduct, but his rights extend only so far as he is real, and his reality is measured by the scope of his consciousness".¹ (*Sādhāna*, pp. 18-19). Like Vivekananda Tagore stressed the necessity of cultivation of strength for the realization of rights, both by the individual and the group. Weakness is a betrayal of the human soul.

We may now look at Tagore's theory of Freedom. Necessity and determination are operative in nature and history. But if the objective world was a theatre of bondage, man could attain freedom and spontaneity in the spiritual world. The free spiritual realm is the world of the creative abundance, or the surplus in man. As a theorist of freedom and spontaneity, he pleaded for liberty of thought and action and liberty of conscience. He stood for free autonomy of the human spirit, and he protested against the pretensions of all organised

institutions like the ecclesiastical pontificate and the state which smother the power of the human individual. The state exists to safeguard the interests of the individual; the individual does not exist for the state. Against coercion and external domination, Tagore sanctified the moral and spiritual freedom of the human spirit.

Tagore, like Vivekananda and Aurobindo, entertained a spiritual conception of freedom. The essence of freedom is illumination of the soul by a process of self-realisation. It lies in the attainment of universality. Love is the pathway to freedom. Aloofness and alienation create maladjustment in the economy of the world. He writes: "In the social or political field, the lack of freedom is based upon the spirit of alienation, on the imperfect realization of the One. There our bondage is in the tortured link of Union".²

As a believer in the spiritual fellowship of man, Tagore refused to abide by the dictates of the nation-state. Nationalism, he said, fosters separatism and its aggressive virulence constitutes a threat to the civilization of the world. National pride is the result of narrow imagination and an absence of spiritual sensitiveness. In place of exalting the consent of the governed it breeds imperialism and chauvinism. Tagore championed the *people* and not the *nation*. Western nationalism, for Tagore, does not represent any high principle of social cooperation or spiritual idealism. It is only a political organisation oriented to the economic exploitation of other races.

Tagore formulated and sponsored a moral approach to politics. His political philosophy proceeded from his deep spiritual humanism. His condemnation of power, his denunciation of nationalism and his stress on a social organic living based on cooperation and fraternity – proceed from his fundamental humanism. But there are points of uneasiness. Modern sociologists like Hobhouse and Maclver also stress the social dimension. But it does not seem correct to minimise the political factor. The association of politics with domination made the political element appear repulsive to Tagore. But as Bentham pointed out, political element has been a necessary evil in man's

history. In a democratic set-up and in the context of technological progress, the political factor is assuming ever-growing proportion in India today. How are we to reconcile this state of affairs with Tagore's social interpretation of history? His philosophy of politics is more *revisionary* than *descriptive*. History, for Tagore, is the enactment of a moral logic and any neglect of the moral values is bound to wound the fibre both of individuals and the group. Thus, like Plato, Burke and Gandhi, Tagore refused to regard politics as the realm of the unmoral.

Although, we have not included Vivekananda in our plan of discourse, we shall say a few words on him as he exerted deep influence on the political orientation of Aurobindo and Subhas Chandra Bose.

Vivekananda championed Hinduism as a universal gospel of ethical humanism and spiritual idealism. The philosophical foundations of Vivekananda's political thought lie in his idealistic non-dualism. His political philosophy is contained in his *Lectures from Colombo to Almora, The East and the West*, and *Modern India*.

The central concept of Vivekananda's system is *Brahman*, and he believed in the harmony of Vedānta and Science. His political philosophy could be termed Vedantic nationalism. Like Hegel, he believed that there is one all-dominating principle manifesting itself in the life of each nation. Religion, he said, had been the momentous guiding principle in India's history. In each nation, he wrote, as in music, there is a main note, a central theme, upon which all others turn. Each nation has a theme: everything else is secondary, India's theme is religion. Vivekananda thus worked to build the foundation of a religious theory of nationalism, which was later advocated by Sri Aurobindo. Vivekananda declared that the national life should be organized on the basis of the religious ideal. Spirituality or religion meant, according to him, the realization of the eternal principles, and was never to be identified with social dogmas, ecclesiastical formulations and obsolete customs. Vivekananda's soul, like that of Bankimchandra, was lit with the luminous vision of Mother India as

a deity, and this conception of India as the visible expression of the divine mother has been the basic concept with the Bengal nationalists and terrorists.

Besides the religious and spiritual theory of nationalism, Vivekananda had a concept of freedom. This was a comprehensive theory. The whole universe, he said, in its constant motion represented the dominant quest for freedom. He regarded the light of liberty as the only condition of growth. Vivekananda not only stood for spiritual freedom or emancipation from the bonds of *māyā*, but also demanded the material or external freedom of man. He believed in the theory of natural right of man. Freedom in its total aspects – physical freedom, mental freedom and spiritual freedom – had been the watchwords of the *Upanisads*, according to him.

Further, his concept of strength and fearlessness, in terms of political philosophy, can be called his theory of resistance. He did not openly advocate any protestant theory of Indian nationalism in opposition to British imperialism. Instead of talking about political freedom and social justice, he talked about a broader concept – strength. Without strength one can neither preserve one's individual existence nor one can fight for the vindication of one's rights. He even said: strength is religion, and declared: "The essence of my religion is strength".³ He justified the theory of fearlessness on the grounds of philosophic Vedantism. He taught the Indian people the immense vigour and vitality of the spirit or *Ātman*. He sought to utilize the Vedantic formula of *abhaya* or fearless character. This gospel of fearlessness was, for Vivekananda, the sure way of national rehabilitation. The fearless advocacy of the strength of the *Ātman* was the best antidote to tyranny and oppression. Vivekananda's poem, "To the Awakened India" is an eloquent call for cultivation of strength.

Vivekananda advocated the moral foundations of national solidarity. He stressed such virtues as manliness, a sense of human dignity and honour. These individualistic qualities had to be supplemented with a positive sense of love for the neighbour. Without the deep sense of selfless service, any talk of national cohesion and fraternity would sound hollow. Western sociologists emphasise the

social aspects of nationalism. Vivekananda harmonises the individualistic and social approaches with the scales tipped in favour of the moral growth of Individuals. The national ideal should comprise both service for the community and emancipation for the individual. Service and renunciation have got to be made the essential bases for the regeneration of the modern nation. However, it was *strength* and *fearlessness* that mark the political testament of Vivekananda. In point of fact the genesis of the Indian nationalist movement owes a great and good deal to the gospel and writings of Vivekananda.

Vivekananda often described himself as a sociologist. He inquired into the causes of India's social and political decline and prescribed a formula to eradicate social inequalities. His sociology was of course spiritually oriented. His Vedānta was practical, and at the political and social levels, he stood for resolute defiance against centers of oppression and tyranny. His social and political ideas followed from his Vedantic conception of the inner self as omnipotent and supreme. He wanted to get rid of all obnoxious ideas of class and caste superiority and tyranny which made the Hindu society loose, stratified and disintegrated. He denounced the evils of untouchability and condemned the wily of the kitchen and cooking pot. He wanted a thorough overhauling of society but he would do that on the basis of the spiritual heritage. He had scant sympathy with westernising ways of the social reformer like Keshab Chandra Sen and Mahadev Govinda Ranade. As a social reformer he preferred the philosophy of social organic growth. In point of fact, Vivekananda was a social realist. This social realism is revealed in his statement that India's political slavery of a thousand years is rooted in the suppression of the masses. Its sociologically realistic interpretation of Indian history was a pioneering attempt.

Sri Aurobindo is one of the major figures in the history of Indian nationalism. At the philosophical level, Aurobindo claimed to have reconciled the divergent trends of Indian ascetic academic transcendental idealism and western secularist materialism. His metaphysics grows out of the fusion of the Eastern and Western ideas. One of the cardinal principles of modern Indian

political philosophy is the reaction against the Benthamite utilitarianism. In place of the greatest good of the greatest number, Vivekananda, Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo advocated the concept of the good of all – the *Sarvabhūtahita* of the *Gītā*. To the Indian thinker the moral mathematics is artificial and egoistic. It leads to the neglect of the interests of the minority. Since the ultimate reality is the spiritual being, a man should try in his personal and political career to realise the good of all living beings. Instead of pleasure and pain as the sovereign criteria, the good of all sentient creatures should be the ethical standard. These criticisms of utilitarianism, found in Vivekananda, Tilak, Gandhi and Aurobindo, are drawn mainly from the idealistic and spiritual ethics and metaphysics. It was T. H. Green who first systematically voiced the protests of neo-Hegelian Oxford idealism against Benthemism. Did he have any influence on Indian thinkers, except on Tilak? Tilak's *Gita Rahasya* bears the influence of Green's *Prolegomena to Ethics*.

Aurobindo is critical of modern capitalism. He criticized the tendencies toward the growth of centralisation and concentration in modern capitalism. Socialism meant for him the growth of an omnipotent authoritarian state. Much of his criticism is similar to such critics of socialism as Max Weber, Von Mises and Friedrich Hayek. Yet he accepted the socialist ideal as a starting point. He thought that the socialist objective of equal opportunity and the guarantee of a social and economic minimum to all was a mandatory goal for organised social help.

We may now note Aurobindo's philosophy of state. In his theory of nationalism Aurobindo reconciled nationalism with ultimate human unity. For him nationalism is not any limited and political creed. He always conceived of nationalism as a stage in the social and political evolution of man. Aurobindo was a prophet of full independence of India, but simultaneously he accepted the realisation of the gospel of human unity as an imperative political necessity for mankind. He viewed that at a certain stage nationalism has to be transcended by a religion of humanity.

There have been critics who have instituted comparative estimate between Bosanquet and Aurobindo in respect of their philosophy of state.

T. H. Green, for example, has will, not force, as the basis of the state. For Green a state is a collectivity of persons recognized by each other as having rights and possessing certain institutions for the maintenance and completion of those rights. Green writes in the tradition of British political democracy and liberalism. We do not find in him the Hegelian identification of the state and absolute right. He attributes more ethical and moral context to the state.

The Hegelian influence is more evident in Basanquet's *The Philosophical Theory of the State*. He regards the state as the entire hierarchy of institutions by which life is determined, e.g., the family, trade, church, and the university. State, for him, is the structure which gives life and meaning to them all. In Aurobindo there is a sharp separation between the political and the non-political. For him, the social institutions have an intrinsic immanent importance, and do not depend for their significance on the political order.

Yet there is a linkage of ideas between Hegel, Basanquet and Aurobindo. All of them almost accept the transcendence of social and political institutions by art, religion and philosophy. Aurobindo does not attribute the philosophic supremacy to art which Hegel and Basanquet do. But all the three accept that the inward self-consciousness which finds its realisation in religion and philosophy is not limited by the confines of the actual political and social institutions.

In the West, one notices supreme emphasis on the collectivity. Individual self-consciousness is conceived of as a reflection or portion of the external consciousness, and the importance of the individual is considerably belittled in Plato, Hegel, Bradley and Basanquet. In Aurobindo there is emphasis on the sanctity and sacredness of the individual as a spiritual self. Aurobindo (and in this respect Basanquet too) upholds a spiritual conception of individuality. But Aurobindo is a personalist. The Reality is at once as much individual, *vyākti* as the collective *samasti*. To Aurobindo the community is also a formation of the

divine Reality. The problem of *Swaraj* or self-government is a matter of great importance. So is the issue of individual rights. He accepted the idealist theory of more freedom as restraint over the egoistic self, but because of the nudities of the British imperialism in India, Aurobindo, like Spencer, is hostile of governmental encroachment on the individual. Yet, for Aurobindo, *Swaraj* is not enough. He pleads for equal opportunity for all. He realizes the worth of the nation-state. For Bosanquet the nation-state is the architectonic of reason, guardian of moral values. But Aurobindo championed the cause of human unity on spiritual foundations. He was critical of the League of Nations and advocated human unity and a free world-union.

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